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Development of Satyananda Yoga

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati



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Development of Satyananda Yoga



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Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

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Dedication tip-on

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Foundations of Yoga

5 February 2011

Basant means ‘spring’ and *panchami* means ‘fifth day’. It was on Basant Panchami, the fifth day of spring that our guru, Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati, laid the foundation of the Bihar School of Yoga in 1963. Throughout India, Basant Panchami is a day when the grace of Goddess Saraswati is invoked. It also marks the day when people begin to involve themselves again in the normal activities of life, after passing through the cold season. This day indicates the onset of new life on earth, the beginning of spring. The foundation of the Bihar School of Yoga brings with it a message of a harmonious way of living and a new beginning for people all over the world. On this occasion, remember the purpose for which the Bihar School of Yoga was established: for the propagation of yogic *vidya*, knowledge; yogic *vijnana*, science; and yogic *sanskriti*, culture.

Purpose of yoga

The purpose of yoga is just one: to show humanity how to worship life. Everybody knows how to worship God, but how do you worship life? In reality, yoga is not a practice or subject of study, but the worship of life.

When we speak about yoga, what do we mean? What does the word ‘yoga’ really mean? Philosophers and intellectuals say that yoga is the union between the individual consciousness and the higher consciousness. In the Sivananda and Satyananda traditions, we say that yoga

means integrating the faculties of head, heart and hands. Many other definitions of yoga have been given, but are these definitions given by the seers who originally developed the system of yoga? Did the seers say that yoga is a way by which one can come closer to the higher consciousness? Was it the seers who said that yoga is a spiritual science? What was the original view of the yogis and seers when they defined and developed the system of yoga?

The beauty of yoga is that it is nothing but contemplation and worship of human life. After exploring your nature and personality, and enhancing the faculties and qualities inherent within, you are ready to appreciate the beauty that life holds for you. The seers who developed yoga said clearly that yoga is a sadhana. It is a practice through which you rediscover yourself, your nature. It is not a philosophy containing abstract ideas that sound pleasing and interesting to an individual. It is not a religion; it does not involve any dogma. It is a collection of practical systems that you can incorporate in your life experience. As you do so, these practices elevate your perception and appreciation of yourself. They lead you to the experience of *poornata*, wholeness, completeness.

Experiencing wholeness

The shanti mantra in the *Ishavasya Upanishad* states:

*Om poornamadah poornamidam poornaat poornamudachyate
poornasya poornamaadaaya poornamevavashishyate.*

Everything is full. If you add full to the full, full remains. If you subtract full from the full, full remains. If you multiply full by the full, full remains. If you divide full by the full, full remains.

Not everyone understands this kind of mathematics. From the perspective of this statement, everything is whole, everything is complete; even you are whole, you are complete. You do not realize that you are complete, that you are *poorna*. The



purpose of yoga as an integrated system is to develop the experience of wholeness and completeness.

The experience of wholeness incorporates and integrates the gross manifested body, the subtle, invisible yet experienceable mind, and the transcendental spirit that is within you. When these three are brought together, the experience of *poornata*, wholeness, takes place. This experience of *poornata* is the purpose and the aim of life. Self-realization or God-realization is the result of having attained wholeness in life, without which that realization would not be possible. Why think of God when God is not your priority, rather achieving wholeness is? In actuality, you cannot think about a transcendental God anyway, as your mind, which is not transcendental, is not capable of doing so.

Somebody once asked Sri Swamiji, “Is it possible to attain self-realization in this lifetime?” He answered that some people believe it is possible and make an attempt and effort towards that goal. He, however, does not believe that God-realization is possible. The questioner asked him, “Why do you say that, when everybody says the purpose

of life is God-realization or self-realization?” Sri Swamiji answered that to begin with, God is a transcendental state of being and existence. Your senses, brain and mind, with which you are trying to grasp that transcendental state, are limited and confined. The brain of a three-month old child cannot comprehend the subject of physics or atomic science. Similarly, with your non-transcendental mind, it is not possible for you to experience the transcendental quality of God. Sri Swamiji was further asked, “Does this mean that everything we do in life with the aspiration of achieving God-realization is useless?” Sri Swamiji said, “No, it is very worthwhile. One should continuously make the effort, but with a different understanding, with a different perspective. First, you have to understand that God-realization or self-realization is not your priority. What is your priority? It is to change the quality of your mind so that it becomes capable of receiving and grasping the transcendental experience. If you cannot change the quality of the mind, it will not be capable of going beyond its own idiosyncrasies. It will not be capable of going beyond its own samskaras and natural limitations.” In this way, Sri Swamiji focused people’s attention on discovering what their priority in life is.

A blind person may say that he wants to see the sun, but what is his priority: to see the sun or to acquire vision? If he can acquire vision by dealing with the cause of blindness then he can see not only the sun, but the entire creation in glorious multicolour. However, without vision, not even the big rock right in front of his step can be seen. Therefore, forget about seeing the golden sun and focus on acquiring vision.

The four ashramas

The primary focus of yoga is the transformation of the quality of your mind, character and nature. You begin the yogic journey with that focus.

The yogic journey is part and parcel of your day-to-day experience and of the different stages that you go through during your lifetime. When the seers were thinking about

the direction of life and how one can live efficiently and effectively with right action, right understanding and right thinking, they considered the entire lifespan of the individual. The seers found that the journey of life that each person has to go through is actually divided into four stages, which are known as *ashramas*.

Traditionally, the word 'ashram' does not refer to a spiritual community, even though that is what most people believe it means. There are two words here: 'a' and 'shram'. 'A' means to come and *shram* means making the necessary effort, putting your energy to good use, overcoming and transforming laziness and weakness into creative dynamism. Shram means to keep yourself linked with *kriya*, action, and *karma*, work. Ashram, therefore, means to come to a place where you can make the required effort to improve the quality of your character, nature, personality and behaviour. Wherever and whatever that place may be, any place where you make an attempt to enhance the quality of your life, becomes an ashram.

The word 'shram' is integral to ashram, and thus in the four ashramas of life, you have to perform four different types of shram. In each ashrama, you have a particular duty to carry out and a definite responsibility to fulfil. The work, behaviour, practice, way of thinking and vision is different for each ashrama. There has to be a different understanding, a different perspective. A different dharma is to be followed and a different aspect of your character is to be developed in each stage. Just like in school you go from class one to two to three, every person should make the effort to go through each of the four ashramas or stages of life and imbibe the teachings of every level. Each ashrama contains its own system of teaching and participation in action, and these have been defined in the vedic tradition.

Development of the intellect

The first ashrama is called *brahmacharya ashrama*, which means that you are a novice in life. In English this period is

called studentship: becoming a student, a novice, a learner. In this ashrama, the effort is aimed at improving the quality and creativity of *buddhi*, the intellect or intelligence. This is also what you see in society today. What faculty are children using in schools and colleges? They are using the intellect. Whether through reading or writing, students develop their intellectual skills to their maximum potential. According to their skill and mental ability, they are able to grasp one subject or another, which then becomes the profession of their life.

After all, why do you educate yourself? To develop the intellect. Why do you study? To maximize the potential of your mind. From kindergarten to university, you make every effort to awaken the potential of your intellectual mind. Some pass and some fail, but all make the effort. It is only when your intellect is developed that you are able to execute your duties and fulfil your obligations in an appropriate and refined manner. Thus, development of the intellect and expansion of the mind is the main focus. This happens through education, which includes external education, incorporating the social education and job-oriented education that all undergo in schools and colleges. This external education needs to be balanced with personal and spiritual education to manage the different moods and conditions of the mind, maintain your peace and balance, and not be buffeted by the whims of pain and pleasure which can swing the mind from one extreme to another. This *anushasana* or personal discipline aims at improving the quality and sharpness of the brain, the intellect, of your understanding and expression.

Remember that the intellect is the motivator of every action. The more you mature and the more understanding and knowledge you develop, the more capable you become of performing an activity. If you perform an action without thinking it through properly, without applying your wisdom, you will pay the price for it. You will suffer the consequences of that action, whether in the form of difficulties and hardship or unhappiness. On the other hand, if you do a job well you

will reap its benefits. When an action is well thought out, when wisdom is used appropriately, then the outcome is good, and you aspire to work harder and attain happiness through positive actions. Thus, the intellect is the motivator of action, and with the right intellect, right actions will take place, whereas with the wrong intellect, wrong actions will take place.

Intellect and actions are very closely connected; they function together hand in hand. As your mind expands, your understanding grows and your comprehension improves. With this improved understanding, there is a natural transformation in your actions. After all, it is through the brain that you decide what to do, what your actions should be. Therefore, developing buddhi, the intellect, is the purpose of brahmacharya ashrama, the state of the novice.

Refinement of actions

When you have completed your education, acquired the necessary knowledge, understanding and skills and are ready to carry out your social responsibilities, then you move into the second ashrama, known as grihastha ashrama. The responsibilities and duties of grihastha ashrama are completely different from brahmacharya ashrama. The focus in grihastha ashrama is not the brain; development of the intellect took place in brahmacharya ashrama. In this ashrama, it is action, not intellect, which predominates. When you act, you become involved with society and people. Therefore, in grihastha ashrama you take up familial and social responsibilities, perform your duties and involve yourself in a profession. You look after the family, follow a career, earn a livelihood, establish yourself in society, and gain name and fame.

In grihastha ashrama, you give expression to the knowledge, skills and learning which you earned in brahmacharya ashrama. You educate yourself to become a doctor in brahmacharya ashrama and you establish the practice in grihastha ashrama. In this way, you become action-oriented in grihastha ashrama. This action in

grihasta ashrama connects you with your family, society and the world at large. It also gives a different perspective of life.

In grihasta ashrama, actions have to be refined, and actions are refined through experience. You go into business with high ambitions, then you are given a tight slap; you lose money, there is a setback. This is one experience. The next time you make the attempt, you are more careful, drawing on the past experience to improve your planning. In this way, action, karma, becomes predominant in grihasta ashrama.

In grihasta ashrama, you have to deal with your responsibilities, duties and commitments towards the family, towards society and towards the community. Your entire focus is on earning a living, to reduce struggle and overcome the feeling of lack in your life. Your effort is to gain the maximum from your actions, to find stability, comfort, satisfaction and peace in life. You go through this process of social, external involvement for a period of time, maybe ten, twenty, thirty or forty years, while the next generation is getting ready. The next generation is passing through the brahmacharya ashrama, developing their intellect in preparation for the grihasta ashrama, where they will take up social obligations and responsibilities.

When the next generation is ready to fulfil the duties, you hand over your responsibilities, obligations and duties to them. They, in turn, make their effort, improve on the work started by you and make progress. At this stage, you are freed from your responsibilities and enter into the third stage.

Purification of emotions

The third stage is *vanaprastha ashrama*, which you call 'the retired life'. The predominant spirit or focus in vanaprastha ashrama is *bhava*, sentiment or emotions, and the aim is to cultivate sattwic emotions. This is important. At this stage, you are free from the obligations of society, profession and family. Of what use is the intellect now? What purpose do actions have now? Therefore, in this stage you refine and



redefine the emotions. The rishis have defined this process: first ashrama, intellect dominated, *buddhi pradhana*; second ashrama, action dominated, *karma pradhana*; third ashrama, emotion dominated, *bhava pradhana*.

Emotions represent an energy that can make you internalize yourself fast. Emotions are the gateway to the psychic dimensions of life, the gateway by which you can bring forth the positive, sattvic dimensions of your life. These emotions are continuously churning while you are passing through the brahmacharya and grihastha ashramas.

People think of their emotions as compassion, love, anger, hatred, jealousy, envy, and so on. However, these are only expressed emotions which have been given a name. The unexpressed emotion, the source of emotion, is a kind of energy which, when tapped, can lead you to an awakened internal experience.

The emotions that have been churning through brahmacharya and grihastha ashramas have to be pacified in vanaprastha ashrama. The suffering you have experienced in life, the scars, the happiness, the fulfilment, the anxiety, the joy, the tension, the relaxation, have all left their mark on your emotions, as have your attachments and aversions, the coming together and the separation. The heart feels happy through relationships, associations and understanding. At the same time, emotions define a state of anxiety and tension in life that makes you identify with gain and loss of external objects.

You have seen a crystal ball. Like ordinary glass, crystal is colourless and will adopt the colour of any object on which it is placed. If you place the crystal on a black cloth, you will see the colour black inside it. If you place the crystal on red, you will see red inside it. Whatever colour you place under the crystal, that colour will reflect itself inside the crystal. Human emotions function in the same manner. By nature, emotions are 'colourless'; they are only force, *shakti*, nothing more. However, when these emotions come in contact with the senses and sense objects, a specific colour manifests inside the clear crystal of emotion. When you see money in front of you, the natural feeling is greed. When you see your baby, the natural feeling is affection. When you see somebody who is more successful than you, it is envy and jealousy. When you see somebody you love, it is passion. When you see somebody who is sick and suffering, it is compassion. Whenever you associate or identify yourself with any sense experience or sense object, a corresponding emotion will manifest. These expressions are referred to as emotions which you feel. In Sanskrit they are called bhava. Bhava is a condition of mind which is non-intellectual, where only purity remains. Yet,

to experience this purity of emotion is difficult, as all the impressions from the previous ashramas have to converge in this third ashrama.

Your mind is like a passport. Wherever you go in material life, all the impressions you gather are like stamps in the passport in the form of memories: a good memory, a bad memory, a pleasant memory, a fulfilling memory, a satisfying memory, a memory of aversion, a memory of neglect, and so on. Memory is like a stamp on the passport; it remains with you all the time. If somebody abused you ten years ago, you still carry that memory with you. The impression is still there, and when you see that person, you turn to that page in your passport and notice, "Yes, the entry was made on this date."

In vanaprastha ashrama, these memory imprints from brahmacharya and grihastha ashramas have to be changed. The passport of the material world expires after grihastha ashrama. When you retire and move to the third stage, you no longer use this passport. You need a new one. Nevertheless, many people keep on renewing their old passport again and again.

When you get a new passport, the pages are clean, fresh and new. No stamps. No visas. The visas that will be issued and the stamps that will be placed on them are those of a new journey. You have travelled extensively and roamed all over the world; you went to Switzerland, you toured the US, visited your children overseas. That external journey is now over. A new voyage begins. The external journey ends and the internal journey begins.

The first passport allows you to travel in the outside world during the brahmacharya and the grihastha ashramas and the second passport allows you to travel in the inner worlds of the next two ashramas.

In the third ashrama you have to apply for a new passport as the old one is full. The condition for acquiring the second passport is that you clean your heart of all the impressions from the past. In vanaprastha ashrama, your mind, thoughts and expressions, which have interacted with external, worldly

influences, have to be cleansed and purified. You have to leave behind the worldly attitude and gradually develop a spiritual aspiration and move towards discovering the *atma*, the spirit.

It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (12:13–20):

*Adveshtaa sarvabhootaanaam maitrah karuna eva cha;
Nirmamo nirahankaarah samaduhkhasukhah kshamee.*

He who hates no creature, who is friendly and compassionate to all, who is free from attachment and egoism, balanced in pleasure and pain. (13)

*Santushtah satatam yogee yataatmaa dridhanishchayah;
Mayyarpitamanobuddhiryo madbhaktah sa me priyah.*

Forgiving, ever content, steady in meditation, possessed of firm conviction, self-controlled, with mind and intellect dedicated to Me, he, My devotee, is dear to Me. (14)

*Yasmaannodvijate loko lokaannodvijate cha yah;
Harshaamarshabhayodvegairmukto yah sa cha me priyah.*

He by whom the world is not agitated and who cannot be agitated by the world, and who is freed from joy, envy, fear and anxiety, he is dear to Me. (15)

*Anapekshah shuchirdaksha udaaseeno gatavyathah;
Sarvaarambhaparityaagee yo madbhaktah sa me priyah.*

He who is free from wants, pure, expert, unconcerned, and untroubled, renouncing all undertakings or commencements, he who is (thus) devoted to Me, is dear to Me. (16)

*Yona hrishyati na dveshti na shochati na kaangkshati;
Shubhaashubhaparityaagee bhaktimaan yah sa me priyah.*

He who neither rejoices, nor hates, nor grieves, nor desires, renouncing good and evil, and who is full of devotion, is dear to Me. (17)

*Samah shatrau cha mitre cha tathaa maanaapamaanayoh;
Sheetoshnasukhaduhkheshu samah sangavivarjitah.*

He who is the same to foe and friend, and in honour and dishonour, who is the same in cold and heat and in pleasure and pain, who is free from attachment. (18)

*Tulyanindaastutirmaunee santushto yena kenachit;
Aniketah sthiramatir bhaktimaan me priyo narah.*

He to whom censure and praise are equal, who is silent, content with anything, homeless, of a steady mind, and full of devotion, that person is dear to Me. (19)

*Ye tu dharmyaamritamidam yathoktam paryupaasate;
Shraddhadhaanaah matparamaa bhaktaaste'teeva me priyaah.*

Verily, they who follow this immortal dharma as described above, endowed with faith, regarding Me as their supreme goal, they, the devotees, are exceedingly dear to Me. (20)

This is what you need to acquire and imbibe in vanaprastha ashrama: equanimity, serenity, balance, wisdom and understanding. However, these conditions will only develop if the heart is cleaned.

For cleaning the heart the process is very simple: *swadhyaya*, study; *satsang*, acquiring new thoughts, ideas, inspirations, aspirations; and *sadhana*, making the effort to change an existing condition and realizing the value or the worthlessness of a certain condition. For cleansing the heart, the ancient seers have also advised aradhana, worship; going on pilgrimages, mantra chanting, performing poojas and visiting ashrams.

You have to overcome the material and worldly reflections and start a new thought process: analyze what you have done so far, assess what you have achieved and plan for the future; where do you want to go from here? In vanaprastha ashrama, the effort is towards *shuddhi*, towards the purification of

emotions, behaviour and nature. Through observation and contemplation, coupled with the necessary attempt and effort, you change the basic, gross quality of the mind and become established in the state of sattwa.

In brahmacharya ashrama it is the tamasic nature that is modified; the dull mind is made active. In grihastha ashrama, it is the rajasic nature that is optimized through action, kriya, involvement, participation, motivation and drive. The sattwic nature has to be cultivated in vanaprastha ashrama. When your mind undergoes this transformation, when sattwic, positive qualities are developed and actions are performed with the right intentions, you are ready to enter the fourth stage of life.

Discovery of the sixth element

In the fourth ashrama, the sannyasa ashrama, the discovery of the sixth element, the *atma tattwa* or spiritual nature, becomes the focus of sadhana and of every effort. In reality, there are not five elements, but six, and atma is the sixth element. Earth, water, fire, air and ether are the five material elements, and the source of these five material elements is



the subtle element called *atma tattwa*. Without *atma tattwa* the five elements cannot exist; you cannot exist.

In this journey from birth to death, you have to move through the four stations, ashramas. In each ashrama you have to imbibe a different quality, education, behaviour, responsibility, obligation and karma.

People like the first two ashramas so much that they keep on renewing their passport for those two ashramas. Even after retirement, when the first passport expires, they take an extension on their passport and continue their external lives. The consequence is social conflict, as the new generation does not get a seat in the plane because the old generation is still sitting on them. This happens when you resist the natural evolution and identify deeply with the outer, the gross and the material, believing it to be the only real aspect of life. The sages have said that this is incorrect. The essence of life is *poornata*, wholeness, and you will only experience that when you have developed your intellect, action, emotion and *atma* by going through the four ashramas.

The blueprint of your life has been given to you. You have been given a life and its purpose has been outlined for you. You need to nurture this life. Your goal must be to make it the best possible one. From the day you are born to your last breath, this effort has to be made, whether you are in *brahmacharya ashrama*, *grihastha ashrama*, *vanaprastha ashrama* or *sannyasa ashrama*.

The five shariras

While you are fulfilling your duty and trying to imbibe the learning of each ashrama, the sages have instructed that your receptivity has to be optimal. They explained that you have come here not only with this gross body, but with much more. Hatha yoga makes this clear, stating that this body is like a container, a pot, a *ghata*. In this pot there is only *shakti*, nothing more. This is the basic concept of hatha yoga. The body is nothing but an expression of *shakti*, the power, the

energy. This idea is contained in the word 'hatha'. *Ha* is the sound of the solar force, the solar energy, or prana shakti. It is the mantra of pingala nadi, the vital energy. *Tha* is the mantra of ida nadi, the mental energy. The vital energy and the mental energy direct this body right from birth until death and the management of these two forces is the aim and focus of hatha yoga. From the perspective of hatha yoga, and even science, energy is the driving force. When you consume food, it is broken down into protein, minerals, carbohydrates, and so on. During this process, energy is extracted and it is that energy which is used by the body, not the food that you eat. If the body is unable to extract the energy from the food, then no matter how much you eat, your body will become weak and you will eventually die. The ability to extract the vital energy from the food you consume is essential. The body needs to break down the rice, the almonds, or whatever the food is, into protein and carbohydrates and make use of the energy to sustain itself, while expelling the waste products. When you eat or drink, what you are extracting from the food is energy. In other words, one form of energy is responsible for the experience and life of the other forms of energy, prana shakti and manas shakti. Dealing with these energies is the focus of hatha yoga.

The gross body: The seers further explained that this material body is composed of *anna*, matter. Therefore, it is called *annamaya sharira*, the body of matter. This body contains in it shakti, energy, and that shakti is another body within *annamaya sharira*. It is like an onion: when you peel the outer layer there is an inner layer, and when you peel that layer there is a third layer, and so on. No onion is made of a single layer; onions always have multiple layers. In the same way, this body has multiple layers, which are called shariras, sheaths or koshas.

The energy field: The second layer, subtler than the first, is *pranamaya sharira*, the layer of energy. Energy is what this body is comprised of. The heart, liver, kidneys and the other internal organs are only agents to move that energy

via different channels throughout the body. In other words, the material body is the receptacle of shakti, pranamaya sharira. This idea has been further clarified by Kirlian photography.

When I was in my teens I used to enjoy Kirlian photography and, like many others, I used to conduct experiments with it. The most popular experiment was to take a picture of a leaf from a tree, look at the aura, the electromagnetic field around the leaf, then cut the leaf in half, throw away one half and take the picture again. Surprise of surprises, the aura around the leaf would not show just that one half, but would still be whole. Despite cutting off half the leaf, in Kirlian photography the image you see is of the whole leaf. What you see is the pranamaya body in the original shape of the leaf. Similarly, if a person has an accident in which a finger is cut off, and a picture is taken using Kirlian photography, the whole finger can be seen and not just the stump. In this way, you can see the energy field in Kirlian photography. The technique allows for the existence of the *pranamaya sharira*.

The *pranamaya* body has its own identity, separate from the gross body. It continues to exist even when the material body ceases to be. In India we say that when the material body dies, the pranas leave the body slowly. The pranas will not leave the physical body for many hours, even when you are clinically dead. Nothing dissipates or disappears instantly upon death. The body dies a slow death even though you may be clinically dead.

If a person suffers from a heart attack, his heart may stop beating, but the pranamaya sharira maintains itself and energy leaves little by little, gradually. Therefore, while the pranamaya body is hidden in the gross body, it has its own identity and existence. The practice of pranayama which is a part of hatha yoga, raja yoga, kundalini yoga and kriya yoga is recommended for the health of the pranamaya body.

The intellectual ability: Even subtler than prana shakti, the body of energy, is the manomaya sharira. It has commonly

been translated as the mental body; however, *manomaya sharira* refers more specifically to the intellectual capacity of the mental body, and can also be called the *buddhimaya sharira*. It is that faculty of the mind which is interacting with the outside world. *Manomaya sharira*, the mind body, is responsible for your ability to live in and experience the world around you. It is the faculty of intelligence which is the cause of mental awareness. If that intelligence were not there, there would be no mental awareness. Therefore, although the term ‘mind’ is being used when you say *manomaya sharira* or *manomaya kosha*, the mind body, the reference is specifically to the intellectual ability of the mind. It is the extroverted mind that undergoes stresses and tensions and experiences both suffering and elation. Pleasure and pain will not bother a mind that is balanced. Thus, the *manomaya sharira* identifies you, the individual, with the outside environment, the world. It is the externally interactive mind.

The levels of awareness and experiences in the mind are different from the levels of awareness and experiences when you are awake. When you sleep at night you are not aware of your body, you are not aware of your environment, you do not know where you are sleeping, you don’t even know that you are living. However, you have the ability to dream and sometimes the memories of dreams remain. If you are asleep, who is dreaming? Who remembers the dream and who forgets it? If you say it is the mind, then where does your consciousness go when you sleep? In the wakeful state you are conscious and you experience everything. In sleep, where does your consciousness go? You are not aware of your senses, you are not aware of the world around you, but you continue to be conscious of your dream. What experience of the mind is that? What is that awareness which remained active even when your outer sensorial awareness was dormant? It is the subtle mind, the *manomaya kosha*.

The ancient seers say that the mind has its own existence, separate from the body and the prana, and is referred to as the *manomaya sharira*. When the mind becomes aware



of itself and begins to create its own experiences and projections, that is manomaya kosha. Sage Patanjali's raja yoga is for the mind, for the manomaya body.

The body of consciousness: Even subtler than the manomaya kosha is the *vijnanamaya sharira*, the dimension of consciousness. *Vijnana* means knowledge, complete, all-knowing awareness, total consciousness. This consciousness is comprised of the four states of wakefulness, dream, sleep and internal awareness. Modern psychology speaks about the conscious faculty, the subconscious faculty and the unconscious faculty. You experience all three, but you are unable to determine what is going on at the subconscious

and unconscious levels. You only understand what is going on at the conscious level. From the scientific perspective and the statement of the seers you have some idea of the subconscious and the unconscious. However, this is only theoretical knowledge and understanding, you do not have actual awareness of these states.

There is a fourth faculty, the superconscious. Recently some psychologists have started talking about this faculty. Yoga, however, has been referring to it for a long time. Sri Aurobindo has said that the last area of awareness, after the unconsciousness, is the state of superconsciousness. In this state, you go beyond time and space, and connect with *jnana*, wisdom. This experience of knowledge, of pure wisdom connects you with the entire creation, *sarvagata*. In this state you no longer identify with the gross body and the five senses. At present, the knowledge that you gain through your experiences allows you to connect only to the material body, your senses, and your outward, mental attitudes and tendencies. You are standing at one end of the spectrum of consciousness, and you can only see the conscious. You are unable to see the subconscious, the unconscious and the superconscious; you are unable to experience or realize them. The body of consciousness, *vijnanamaya kosha*, also has its own individual identity, separate from the mind. It is beyond the mind. In *vijnanamaya kosha*, consciousness is experienced in its totality.

The consciousness is composed of the conscious faculty, which is the *jagrat* or the waking state; the subconscious is the drowsy, dreaming state; the unconscious is the *nidra*, dormant state; and beyond this is the *turiya*, superconscious state in which one is aware internally and is the observer of everything. In this state, one has the ability to see without the eyes, to hear without the ears, to smell without the nose and to touch and feel without the hands. All this is part of *vijnanamaya kosha*: the exploration of consciousness from the conscious through the subconscious and the unconscious to the superconscious.

The essence within: Even subtler than vijñanamaya, and beyond it, is the fifth body, the spirit body, the *atmamaya* or *anandamaya sharira*. The actual term is *atmamaya*, as the atma pervades this kosha. However, it is also called *anandamaya sharira*, as you overcome all the unhappiness and misery of life when you reach this stage, when you can access this body, when this kosha becomes predominant. Just one feeling remains, that of joy, bliss, happiness, fulfilment and wholeness. In this state, you transcend the three *gunas* or qualities, *sattwa*, *rajas* and *tamas*, and are united with and established in *paramatma*, the Supreme Being.

When the awareness of the atma awakens it leads to the realization of the individual spirit and brings forth three experiences: truth, *satyam*; auspiciousness, *shivam*; and beauty, *sundaram*. When truth, beauty and auspiciousness come together, there is only bliss, *ananda*. Thus the fifth body has been referred to as *anandamaya kosha*, in addition to being called *atma kosha*.

The five *shariras* or bodies must be harmonized. You were not born with just this one body, but with five bodies; you are sitting here with five bodies. It's like wearing layers of garments. After all, what do you do in winter? You first put on thermals, then you wear your kurta, over that your sweater, then you wrap a scarf around your neck, and finally you cover yourself with a shawl. Just like you have layers of clothing, similarly you have layers of bodies. The five layers must be perfectly tuned to each other so there is perfect synchronicity. The method to maintain the tuning is *sadhana*, and that *sadhana* is yoga.

Integral growth

Hatha yoga is recommended for *annamaya sharira*. It strengthens the physical body by removing the weaknesses from the organs, muscles, ligaments, joints, etc. Pranayama is essential for the *pranamaya* body. Raja yoga is for the mind, for the *manomaya* body. Kundalini yoga is for the *vijñanamaya* body. It awakens the hidden potential of the

consciousness. This awakened consciousness then guides you in your life. It guides your actions, thoughts and behaviour. In this state of awakened consciousness you acquire wisdom which allows you to make the best and most appropriate choices. The kundalini shakti pierces all the *chakras*, the psychic centres, as it proceeds upward. Each chakra represents a different state of the mind: the gross mind, the focused mind, the awakened mind, and so on. Kundalini yoga is recommended for the awakening of the *vijnanamaya sharira*. For the *anandamaya sharira* experience, the sages recommended mantra and meditation: mantra sadhana, mantra yoga, meditation practices and meditative yoga.

Meditation is a part of all the yoga branches, whether raja yoga, hatha yoga or any other yoga. Yoga is not one-dimensional; it is a holistic science. Therefore, when the phrase 'yoga sadhana' is used, understand that it refers to integral growth. When hatha yoga is being discussed, you must know that it is a sadhana for the physical body. If raja yoga is the topic then it is related to your mind. When you understand yoga in this manner, you understand it as the sages and seers envisioned it.

If the five layers of your being are properly tuned and managed, it becomes very easy to go through the four ashramas, or stages of life, and to move from a state of no wisdom, meaning the time you were born when you did not even know what was left, right, up and down, to social wisdom, to spiritual wisdom, and finally to absolute wisdom and completeness.

Meaning of yoga

To go through this journey of life successfully, the method to adopt is yoga. If you look for the meaning of yoga in the dictionary, it is union: to unify, join or become one. Union is yoga, joining is yoga, becoming one is yoga, but what is being joined to what?

If a philosopher is asked what yoga is, he will say it is the union of the soul with the Supreme Being, the union of *atma*

with paramatma. A philosopher says that *atma*, the spirit, the soul, is beyond everything. However, as the *atma* resides in the body, it is bound to be affected by the influences of the body and the mind. Your mind is just energy, it cannot be seen. Nevertheless, while it is connected with the physical body, it is affected by the ups and downs of the body. When the body is weak, the mind becomes weak. When the body is energetic, the mind feels energetic. There is a relation, a connection. One influences the other and that, in turn, influences the *atma*. Consequently, the state of *paramatma* within you is affected by the positive and the negative qualities of the body.

Sri Swamiji says that when you see a hungry man, know that the God in him is hungry. When you give him a roti, know that you are feeding God. You are not feeding the hungry person, but the God who resides within him. If this body is experiencing hunger, then the mind is experiencing hunger, and the *atma* is experiencing hunger. If this body is experiencing suffering, then the mind experiences suffering, and the *atma* is experiencing suffering. If the *atma* is not free from suffering, then *paramatma* is also not free from it.

Ask, “What is the meaning of yoga? What are the forces that unite? What joins with what?” to a student of the Bihar School of Yoga. He will reply that it is the union of head, heart and hands: intellect, emotions and action. The integration of head, heart and hands is the goal of yoga.

Yoga is an understanding and appreciation of life. It is not just moving the hands and fingers and stretching yourself in front of the mirror to see how flexible you have become and whether you can stand like a ballerina. Many people practise yoga because they like to see themselves in the mirror. Many yoga studios today have walls full of mirrors so you can see yourself and also others.

If you ask a person who is sick what is the meaning of yoga, he will say, “I do not know and I do not care. I practise yoga to get rid of my illness. I simply want to get healthy and that is why I practise yoga.”



Just like your body can become sick with disease, similarly, prana can become sick, the mind can become sick, consciousness can become sick and the atma can become sick too. The sages have said that when the body is sick, do some practices to free the body of the sickness. When the mind is sick, do some practices to overcome the tensions and difficulties of the mind. When your prana is low, adopt a practice to enhance your energy. If you want to know yourself, choose practices to enhance your awareness. In the same way, make an effort for the atma to experience peace and joy. The atma can become sick and joyous, feel pain and pleasure; it experiences everything. When the atma experiences everything, rest assured that the paramatma also experiences everything. Paramatma is not beyond pain or happiness. At the same time, paramatma is also a *drashta*, seer, of all.

You have to define yoga for yourself according to your mentality, attitude and understanding. You have to find the appropriate meaning of yoga applicable to you. Over the

last forty years, I have read many treatises on yoga, written by various people. Many have expressed great ideas; many have written ordinary things. After reading them all I wonder, 'Are these writers expressing the concepts of yoga as the ancients have envisioned, or are they merely putting down their own ideas on paper?' After having observed the goings on, I have come to one conclusion: nobody is reflecting on or propagating the yoga that the rishis and sages developed. Nobody is inspired by what the original seers advocated and promoted. Everybody has grabbed a small piece of the whole yogic pie and is trying to achieve their goal through that piece. Some move their legs and arms and want to perfect yoga through that. Some claim the way is through pinching your nose. Others swear by mantra chanting. Still others try to perfect yoga by awakening the kundalini. In this way, through hatha yoga, through kriya yoga, through kundalini yoga and through raja yoga each one tries to perfect yoga. Everybody has grabbed one aspect and claims to be the master of that yoga. This is not a bad thing. It should be this way. However, to think that through one branch of yoga, through the study of one aspect of yoga, you can realize the goal of yoga is incorrect.

Each branch of yoga has its own application and its own set of benefits which are clearly defined. The theory of hatha yoga is that the body is like an earthen vessel and it must not be allowed to become weak. If a clay pot is weak, it will break with the slightest knock. If it is heated too much, it will crack. It can be effectively used only when it is properly fired. Similarly, this body, with all its multiple systems is like a vessel. What do you put in a vessel? What do you store in a container? You put some matter in it, maybe grain, water, jam or pickle; all you can put in it is matter or substance. What does the pot of the body hold? According to hatha yoga, the vessel of the body contains *shakti*, *urja* or energy. Remove this energy and you will die. As long as this energy is within you, you are alive. This energy within you has been given a name. It is called *prana shakti*, life force. The word *hatha* is made up

of two words: *ha*, which represents solar energy, the symbol of prana shakti, and *tha*, which represents lunar energy, the symbol of *manas shakti* or mind power. These are the only two elements that exist inside this vessel. Therefore, the aim of hatha yoga is to harmonize these two energies, to balance and regulate their flow.

Every branch of yoga has a particular goal, motive and purpose. Raja yoga defines yoga as *chitta vritti nirodhah*, which can be translated as, “Managing the modifications of the mind” (is yoga). Thus, the aim of raja yoga is to cultivate the mind, just as the purpose of hatha yoga is to balance the two energies of ida and pingala in order to attain total health. The sadhana that you perform should be an integrated sadhana which will benefit the body, the mind, prana, consciousness and also the atma. This collective process is called yoga sadhana.

Universal language of yoga

From the beginning of time yoga has been considered a science and not a religion. In India, there are different sects: Shaivites, those who worship Lord Shiva; Vaishnavites, followers of Lord Vishnu; Shaktas, followers of Shakti. However, the sadhana for the followers of all these streams is yoga. If yoga is beneficial for a Shiva disciple, then it is equally beneficial for a Vishnu disciple, a Jain or a Buddhist, a Christian and a Muslim. This is evident in the history of India. No religion has advanced without yoga. Mahatma Buddha practised yoga, Mahavira practised yoga, they all practised yoga as a sadhana. Their philosophy might be different, their vision might be different, their thinking might be different, but their sadhana was yoga. Yoga has always been considered a practice, a science, never a religion. This is because no matter the religion a person practises or the beliefs he follows, no matter where he lives or what he does, he must attempt to beautify his life, to develop the hidden potential of life and worship life.

The Evolution of Yoga

6 February 2011

The rishis divided human life into four chapters to reach the pinnacle of life. In each of these four chapters, you have a different responsibility, duty, attitude, code of conduct and mindset. The sages conceived of this progression in life for you to overcome the material mentality, to become established in a higher spiritual mentality, and achieve wholeness.

The outward journey

In the first two stages of life, brahmacharya ashrama and grihastha ashrama, your predisposition is outward and extroverted, leading to interaction with the world of senses and sense objects.

Brahmacharya ashrama is the period of education and learning, when you equip yourself with the necessary skills to survive in the material society. This stage is intellect-oriented as you are working on enhancing the intellectual capacity of the mind. Your effort is aimed at the maturing of your understanding. What happens in school? What do children do? They study, learn and gather information, so that their intellect may grow. In brahmacharya ashrama you acquire the skills to survive when you move on to your next ashrama. The emphasis of brahmacharya ashrama is, therefore, the cultivation of *buddhi*, intelligence and intellect.

When the mind is developed, you are ready for grihastha ashrama. After you have educated yourself and learnt

the subjects that you want to learn and that help in your survival, you take on a different responsibility towards family, profession, society, friends, and express yourself socially.

Grihastha ashrama is action-oriented. You have responsibilities, duties, a family to look after, work to be done, a business to attend to. You have to be mindful of society and become wise in the ways of the world. The main focus in this ashrama is the appropriate performance of karma, which leads to fulfilment and success in the life of a *grihastha*, householder. All this is mind and action or work-oriented.

The above two stages of life relate to interaction with the world of sense objects, nature and the environment. As a consequence, the mind is totally extroverted: involved here, involved there, involved with this person, involved with that person, experiencing this pleasure, experiencing this pain, experiencing contentment, depression, anxiety, sensorial love, the emotional need for affection, and so on. All the experiences of life that you have lived until today are the result of the extroverted mind associating and identifying with the world of the senses and sense objects. When your bent of mind is outward and extroverted, then over a period of time, this outward tendency makes your mind obsessive to needs leading to pleasure.

Once the mind becomes obsessive, you have to deal with the intensity of attractions and repulsions, attachments and aversions, love and hate, happiness and sorrow. This burden of happiness and sorrow causes despondency and confusion about the direction of your responsibilities.

The inner journey

A natural break occurs in this extroverted life and that is the time when you retire. You retire from your profession, help your children establish themselves, help them get settled, and with this, your duties, your responsibilities are over. The responsibilities and obligations with which you were involved are now passed on to the next generation.

At this point you move into the next two stages of life and the focus is now on internalizing yourself. The seers have emphasized the need to change the outward and extroverted patterns of the mind, and redirect them towards the soul, or becoming *atmamukhi*. This turning occurs over the next two stages of vanaprastha ashrama and sannyasa ashrama. In these two stages the effort is to alter the thoughts, change the perspective, redirect the mind and thereby completely transform life.

The third stage, vanaprastha, translated means ‘going to the forest’. What does that mean? Even if you wanted to go to the forest, where would you go? How do you enter the stage of vanaprastha ashrama?” Imagine that you do leave society and move into the forest. What is your condition? You are alone, without any props or crutches, without any support. You have to survive; you have to fend for yourself. Where will you sleep when it rains? What will you eat when hungry? A vegetarian will need a spade and a pickaxe to dig out edible roots and bulbs. Water is not easily available. You may be at the bank of a river, but you don’t know if its water is drinkable. There are no other people around you; you live a solitary and secluded life. When life is solitary and secluded, there is no other option but to contemplate, to think and to review what you have experienced and expressed in life.

This same situation is to be created in a social setting, by isolating yourself from the normal environment you have lived in all your life: the people you have identified with, the problems you have dealt with and the stresses and anxieties which have affected you day in, day out when the mind was extroverted.

The meaning of vanaprastha ashrama, therefore, becomes a time for solitude, reflection and transformation. It is a time to distance yourself from the responsibilities and situations that have surrounded you all your life. It is time for other people to take over and carry on with the work, so that you can withdraw and begin the inner search. In this stage, find

the time to sit quietly and gradually detach yourself from those dependencies that bind you to family and society. I am using the word ‘dependency’, as we are all dependent on each other through expectations, desires, motivations and aspirations. Everything is dependent on our relationship with others. In vanaprastha, isolation is acquired by detaching yourself from those conditions, which until this point have bound you. It is a time to separate from the environment that you have been surrounded by all your life, the family with which you lived, the obligations which you have had to fulfil all your life, and become a spectator. Become a witness and watch the world unfold, but with a new awareness and perspective. Make an attempt to change your samskaras and thinking. Some people find it easy to simply leave those old conditions, people and environments and go to live in a new place. However, while they may be able to leave the outer conditions, they are unable to renounce the internal dependencies, and that is where the problem lies.

Once my guru, Sri Swami Satyananda, told me, “Listen Niranjan, you think there is peace in the mountains? There is no silence, there is no peace in the remote caves of the Himalayas and there is no noise, no disturbance in the middle of the Munger market. All those experiences exist in your mind. If your mind is disturbed, you carry along your samskaras and impressions even when you renounce the world and go to the mountains to live alone in a cave. Those samskaras will not allow you to experience peace, even in a peaceful environment. If you can manage your mind, if you can harmonize and balance your mind, then even if you sit to meditate in the middle of Munger market, you will not hear a single sound and you will be at peace with yourself.”

So far, until grihastha ashrama, your mind was focused on the world, on the senses and sense objects. Each of these interactions left their impression. Happiness and sorrow, love and hate, the good, the bad, the words spoken to you, the behaviours you encountered, are carried as memories in your mind. When you meet someone, you form an opinion about



the person: good or bad. Somewhere in your mind, you form an impression. The person is just a person, but you judge him by his words and conduct. If his words, actions and behaviour match your parameters, you decide he is good. If they do not match your definitions, you form the opinion that he is not good.

All these good and bad impressions remain imprinted on your mind. Each one of these experiences is stored in the mind either as a *samskara*, a desire, a memory or an emotion, and they stay with you until the end of your life. The potency of the experiences does not diminish over time. When the body gets old, it becomes weak, but these stamps and imprints on the mind do not weaken. They do not fade away or get erased. That is why it is said that when you are free from your duties and responsibilities, live in isolation, move away from all those circumstances that you have lived with all your life and spend your time in *atmachintana* or *atmashodha*, self-contemplation. Practise *swadhyaya*, study of the self; engage in satsang and do some sadhana so that little by little, you can erase one imprint, then another, and so on. In this way, make an effort to erase all the mental imprints

so that the mind and heart become pure, and the tamasic mind converts into a sattwic mind. If you live in a coal mine, your clothes and body are bound to get dirty. Somewhere or the other there will be a black stain. In the same way, you live in the world and the world is bound to stain the mind. As the stains on the mind increase, the clarity of the mind decreases. When a freshly washed, white cloth is stained or covered in dust, you cannot see its whiteness, but that does not mean the cloth is black. The cloth is still a white cloth, it has just become dirty. The mind functions in exactly the same manner.

The basic nature of the mind is peaceful and gentle, but it becomes restless when it comes in contact with the world. It becomes restless when associating and identifying with sense objects; it becomes attracted to them and desires them.

A reclusive lifestyle, swadhyaya, satsang and sadhana, become the tools to cleanse the mind. Negative, distorted and destructive thoughts are removed, and are replaced with good and positive thoughts in an attempt to rediscover the effulgence of the mind.

In vanaprastha ashrama, attaining the state of internal peace is an important indication of progress. When people hear ‘internalize the mind’, they generally think of meditation. While living your normal life, you simply close your eyes and meditate for half an hour or one hour, and that is your meditative effort. However, that meditation does not change the existing software of the mind, as all the different faculties of the mind which express themselves in this external environment are bound by the laws of society, nature and personality. Therefore, the purpose of vanaprastha is the attainment of mental peace and purity, *shanti* and *shuddhata*. This is achieved through reflection, introspection, study, observation and satsang. All these techniques help you understand yourself, help you observe yourself, help you fine-tune your personality and character. In this way, the dross of the mind is gradually lessened and as a result, the mind gradually becomes pure, *sattwic*.

The state of sattwa modifies the human emotion. The yogis use the power of emotion to go within themselves. They don't use the power of thought, they don't use the power of the mind; they use the power of bhava to go within. In the vanaprastha stage, you try to change the software of your mind and develop a different perspective in life, which is not extroverted, but internally aware, spiritually aware, so that you can rectify the emotional process.

Sri Swamiji defines emotion is 'energy in motion'. It is raw energy that can easily explode. When outer situations explode this raw energy, then emotions are expressed outwardly in the form of anger, jealousy, need, greed, envy, and so on. However, when this emotional energy explodes because of some internal experience, these emotions do not become gross, they become transformative; they become transcendental, spiritual. They help you to come closer to your own spiritual nature.

When you look at the life of every saint and guru, once they have activated their spiritual nature to the highest potential, all they express is unconditional love and compassion for everyone and that becomes their nature. That is the shuddhi of bhava. That is the purification of emotions, where the power of emotion is not used to fulfil your own demands and needs, but instead becomes a channel to bring happiness, fulfilment and contentment into the life of another person. When this state becomes predominant, you are ready to move into the fourth stage of life, which is sannyasa life.

Sannyasa ashrama is spirit-oriented. The effort and focus at this stage is to know the nature of the soul, *atma tattwa*, and experience inner realization. When this is achieved, the mind becomes pure and there is no crookedness or impurity left in one's life, as can be seen in the lives of saints. If a psychologist were to analyze the life and character of Mahavira, the founder of Jainism, he would not be able to find any fault in his personality, as he was established in truth. You will not be able to find any fault in



Mahatma Buddha's personality. Study the life of any saint. Swami Sivananda, Ramana Maharshi, Swami Satyananda, Anandamayi Ma, and many others. In their lives, you will not find any of the positive or negative qualities, weakness or strength associated with the material world. Instead, their lives reflect equanimity and balance. The sense of duality does not exist. They see everything as one. This is because they have all established themselves in truth.

Completing the journey

Brahmacharya ashrama is intellect-oriented, grihastha ashrama is work-oriented, vanaprastha ashrama is emotion-

oriented. In sannyasa ashrama the soul is the focus and the sentiment is atmabhava. Sannyasa ashrama is soul-oriented.

These are the four stages of life that you have to pass through to experience completeness, wholeness and fulfilment in life. If you do not wish to achieve that, you can remain in any ashrama of your choice. You can remain in brahmacharya or grihastha ashrama your whole life. You can keep renewing your passport. What difference does it make? Continue to stamp it with desires and aspirations and passions and the passport will get heavier and heavier.

As individuals, you are part of a process of growth, evolution and maturity: maturity of consciousness, emotion, energy, behaviour and character. Maturity comes with the purity of personality. The individual who has to complete the journey through the four stages of life is called a human being. He is not only a material individual, but also a spiritual individual. You are not only a material body, but also a spiritual personality. You are not only a sensory body, but also a mental personality, an emotional personality. You have an infinite source of luminosity inside, but are aware of only a fraction of that luminosity at the conscious level. The complete luminosity is experienced when you move from the conscious level to the superconscious level. At that stage, total luminosity is experienced by the individual, the *sadhaka*, the practitioner.

If you choose to follow the path and go through the four stages, then you will definitely experience fulfilment, happiness and peace. You will discover the true nature of the soul, the atma tattwa, the eternal quest since time immemorial. The method to achieve this is through continuous practice or sadhana. This sadhana is comprised of many aspects and systems and in their totality they are called yoga.

The development of yoga

The tanpura is a four-stringed Indian instrument. If the strings of the tanpura are not properly tuned, the sound

produced is harsh and unpleasant. On the other hand, when all the strings are well tuned, you can sing any musical scale with the sound it produces. This is harmony. Similarly, you need to fine-tune the four strings of your personality: body, mind, emotions, spirit. Manas, buddhi, chitta, ahamkara. For the purpose of fine-tuning, the sadhana is yoga.

When the rishis and munis were developing yoga sadhana, they experimented on themselves through tapasya, sadhana, worship, meditation and yoga. Depending on their practice they reached different levels of attainment. As they established themselves in higher states of consciousness and attained purity of mind, they adopted one ideal, one principle in their life. Their lifestyle became their ideal, it became sattwic and they were able to set an example for society, for the world. The Indian culture and its traditions are alive today because of these great men and women, and because we follow the principles they established, and make an effort to incorporate their teachings into our lives.

Yoga: a scientific method

Yoga was developed in a very scientific and systematic way. It deals with the body first. In your lifespan you encounter two conditions: sickness and old age, nothing more. Both these conditions debilitate a person. When you fall sick, feel weak or grow old, you are unable to perform your duties. The senses lose their sharpness, the limbs lose their strength and the organs become sluggish. Yoga instructs you to keep the body healthy to maintain the energy level through the practices of hatha yoga.

If you study the ancient texts on hatha yoga, whether it be written by Sage Swatmarama or by Sage Gheranda, you will find that with the description of each asana, they also mention the benefits of those asanas: what particular pain is relieved, what illness is cured. Both Sage Gheranda and Sage Swatmarama have emphasized the benefits of asanas to ensure that the body, which is made up of matter, remains healthy.

For the pranamaya body, the system of pranayama was introduced. For the manomaya or mental body, raja yoga is the recommended method to still the restless mind. Kundalini yoga was propagated for the discovery of the vijñanamaya kosha. Only through kundalini yoga can you awaken the dormant energy and power within you and overcome the negative influences of your actions and conditionings, which ultimately leads to the union of the individual consciousness with the higher reality. Finally, for anandamaya kosha, meditation is the prescribed practice, and beyond that is samadhi, living in the realm of bliss.

This is how yoga advanced and developed. This is how yogic sadhana expanded and grew. This is the way the seers and sages introduced yoga to society: as a sadhana through which you can purify the mind and change the nature, patterns and conditionings of the mind.

A universal practice

Yoga as sadhana, as practice, has been adopted by people of every tradition and walk in life, by every school of thought and philosophy. People from all religious sects and beliefs, whether Muslim, Christian, Shaivite, Vaishnava, Shakta, Buddhist or Sikh, have embraced yoga. Buddha practised yoga; vipassana is a practice of pratyahara. Mahavira practised yoga. Founders of different traditions have practised yoga to achieve the highest level of experience and consciousness and then have propagated their philosophy, whatever it may have been. There is documented evidence that even Christ practised yoga. When Christ came to India and lived here for twelve years, he practised yoga. He encountered the bhakti movement, the vedic movement, the Buddhist movement, and he lived amongst all these people. These are documented historical facts that most people are not aware of. I am giving these examples to illustrate that yoga is a universal practice for transcending the self.

Prompted by the desire to find ways to maximize human potential, these learned men spread the message of yoga

throughout the world. Many thousands of years ago, when our community was a tribal, nomadic community, yoga had already spread throughout the world. During the vedic era there was no corner of the world that yoga had not reached. Every community, sect, belief and civilization had adopted yoga, and history bears witness to this fact. Evidence of yoga was found in the pre-Columbian cultures of South America. When I lived in South America as a teenager, I did research and discovered that the pre-Columbian civilizations, such as the Aztecs, the Mayans, the Incas, the Chibchas, had a strong yogic and spiritual foundation, which was not only theoretical but also practical. Pre-Columbian statues in different museums and in different archaeological parks depict classical yoga postures such as the scorpion pose, the headstand, the peacock pose, vajrasana, sukhasana, and padmasana. These statues have been carbon-dated at five or six thousand years ago.

Similar relics including sketches, statues and other yogic symbols are also found in the regions of North America, East Africa, Central Asia and Europe, including Denmark, Norway and Sweden, where ancient civilizations existed. In the Scandinavian countries, yantras, mandalas, images similar to chakras, and other symbols have been discovered. How did such symbols reach these places? The tradition must have existed; those societies must have accepted these ideologies.

When I visited those countries and studied their ancient cultures, I was surprised to find literature on kundalini. The writings do not reflect Indian philosophy; rather, they are representative of an ancient western culture. In this way, at one time, yoga as a sadhana was a worldwide practice and study.

Could such sketches and statues have simply emerged out of somebody's imagination? No, not possible. You have to see something, experience it, to be able to reproduce it. There are no drawings depicting animals not indigenous to the country. There are, however, drawings and statues depicting asanas.

Every community in South America had their own religion, their own philosophy, their own gods and goddesses.

Nobody believed in Brahma, Vishnu or Mahesh there, neither did they worship Devi. They had their own objects of worship and their own idols. Yet they accepted yoga. This applies to the Scandinavian countries and the African people as well. From China to Iran, one can find the presence and imprint of yoga. This indicates that there was a time, an era, when through the power of their deep thought and wisdom, scholars and sages had spread the message of yoga throughout the world.

Preservation of yoga

Nothing remains constant. There are wars, migrations, famines, natural calamities; there is death and destruction. Ancient civilizations gradually changed, many cultures were wiped out, and yoga disappeared from the western countries. What was the reason? First, there were very few gurus and ascetics who could preserve the system. Second, other aggressive civilizations brought in their own faiths and ideologies. Thus, for a while, yoga all but disappeared from society.



A siddha is a visionary. He can see the future, determine the future needs of society and prepare for them today. Such thinkers, gurus, rishis, ascetics and scholars do not exist in large numbers. In such a circumstance, who will guide the people, who will guide society? That said, we have to accept that this is a natural process in life. Sometimes there is flood, sometimes famine. After the vedic period, there was a famine. With repeated invasions, two thousand years of suppression and changing social circumstances, yoga as a sadhana disappeared from Indian society too. The sages and sannyasins with their foresight understood the vision of yoga, saw its relevance in future lifestyles, and continued their efforts to develop and research into yoga. Consequently, people ended up believing that yoga is only for renunciates who aspire for God-realization and that it has nothing to do with society. This belief emerged because yoga became a secret science as a result of the social, natural, political and climatic changes, migrations, and other reasons.

The sages preserved the theory, philosophy and practice of this yogic science. To accomplish this, the instructions on yoga were written in the form of *sutras*, short sentences, which require you to apply your mind in order to understand their meaning. They are like formulas, such as $E = mc^2$. You need to apply your mind to understand the meaning of $E = mc^2$. *Chitta vritti nirodhah*: apply your mind to this sutra and establish what is vritti and how to manage it. In this manner, the instructions of yoga were given as formulas, not as literary passages. These formulas were preserved by yogis and sadhus, waiting for the right time to bring them forward when society was again in need of them.

Yoga in modern times

Throughout the ages there have been visionaries who, in times of need, revived and brought forth the ancient knowledge in a modern language for people to understand, adopt and incorporate that wisdom into their lives. When Sage Patanjali appeared on the scene, he thought about

the effects of yoga on the human mind. How can this mind, which is gross, tamasic and material, be transformed into a luminous, spiritual mind? What makes the mind function and tick? These were his questions and to answer them he conducted research into yoga. He wrote a thesis on his research, which became the *Yoga Sutras* of Sage Patanjali. Similarly, other sages appeared at different times and worked on different aspects of yoga.

Sage Gheranda came and wrote his thesis on hatha yoga. Sage Swatmarama revised this knowledge of hatha yoga into *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*. Sage Narada wrote a thesis on the subject of bhakti yoga as did Sage Shandilya. Sage Dattatreya wrote a thesis called the *Dattatreya Samhita*. In this manner, at different times, visionaries appeared and put this wisdom, this knowledge, this sadhana into a practical form.

Ages passed and the modern times arrived. Here emerged a few people who attempted to bring yoga back into society. It was in the 19th century that sannyasins, who were also renunciates and yogis, began reviving yoga and started teaching it. Swami Vivekananda first spoke on the subject of yoga and the need to develop the spiritual personality. He made people again think about the teachings the ancients had left, about the progression through life and how you can use the yogic practices to progress in this journey. Around the same time, there was another luminary who wrote books on yoga, asana, pranayama and shatkarmas, and his name was Yogi Ramcharak. This was the 19th century when printing presses and paper and pens were rare and limited books were published. He published four books: hatha yoga, raja yoga, karma yoga and bhakti yoga. These four yogas became the first to emerge in modern civilization. Yogi Ramcharak's books formed the first literary works on yoga, and helped spread awareness of yoga in the western countries. Twenty, thirty years ago, when I visited some of the countries in the West, the only books I came across were: Yogi Ramcharak, *Hatha Yoga*; Yogi Ramcharak, *Raja Yoga*;

Yogi Ramcharak, *Karma Yoga*; Yogi Ramcharak, *Bhakti Yoga*. Swami Vivekananda's four discourses and Yogi Ramcharak's four books reintroduced yoga to society. They became the basis for society to reacquaint itself with this ancient science.

Next, Paramahansa Yogananda travelled within India and overseas, educating people on the subject of kriya yoga and thus he added one more subject of classical yoga to the body of yoga that people were becoming aware of. In the southern part of India, some people aspired to become proficient in hatha yoga, some in kriya yoga, while in northern India people took to hatha yoga and raja yoga. Due to such sannyasins, yoga was reintroduced into society. A beginning was made. There was a social anxiousness to understand what was being said by the sannyasins, there was a desire to try it out.

Swami Sivananda

Around the middle of the 20th century, our paramguru, Swami Sivananda, became a foremost name in the yogic movement. He worked to bring yoga to the common man. He gave yoga a new definition. This definition came out of his understanding of human life. Swami Sivananda was a medical doctor by profession and he had a thriving practice in Malaya, currently known as Malaysia. He was working on a banana farm as a doctor for all the workers who were brought into the country to work. He earned a good income, as per the standards of those times.

The inspiration: One day, a wandering sannyasin visited Malaya, and went to that farm to give some satsang and discourse. This ascetic sang a few *kirtans* and talked on a few spiritual topics. He gave a book on spiritual life to the doctor. The title of the book was *Brahma Vichara*, 'Reflections on Spirituality'. After reading that book, Swami Sivananda's whole outlook changed.

His inner voice told him that through his current occupation, he would be unable to make any substantial contribution towards the wellbeing of people. He thought,



‘All I do is treat the body. There is so much strife, so much suffering in people’s lives that needs to be resolved.’

Overnight, he decided to leave his thriving medical practice, packed his bags, gave his possessions away to the workers and came back to India by ship. He landed in Madras, now Chennai, called a friend and said, “The Himalayas are calling me; I’m not going to go home. Take this luggage, you can give it to the family. I am free from my family as of today.” From the port, he went straight to the train station, sat on a train and headed northward, determined to satisfy his newfound spiritual yearning. He resolved to find an answer to the question of how to relieve people of their suffering. In this way, the spiritual quest began in Swami Sivananda’s life.

The search: Swami Sivananda travelled all over northern India, wandering as an ascetic, meeting with people, giving medical help, observing and imbibing from them. At all times his mind was focused on how to help people overcome their sadness, how to help resolve the problems and difficulties that people had in society. As he was a medical doctor, Swami

Sivananda observed the suffering of people everywhere. Remember that this was the early 20th century and the medical field was not as developed as it is today. Doctors were very few and far apart. There were few medicines and many patients, and doctors had to prepare medicines by hand, by putting different chemicals together and rolling them up, which were then dispensed in small paper packets. Swami Sivananda believed that for the wellbeing of the body, medicine alone was not enough.

As he observed the suffering, thoughts came to his mind, ‘What can I do to help these people overcome their physical, psychological and spiritual suffering? How can I help them?’ ‘Who will guide me, who will direct me? Who will be my inspiration?’ With these questions in mind, he wandered about the north of the country. He encountered many sadhus, but destiny had another plan for Swami Sivananda and he did not stay anywhere for long.

Finding a guru: Eventually, in the 1920s, he came one day to the region of Rishikesh and Haridwar. There, somewhat exhausted from all the travelling, he reclined against a tree, closed his eyes and started to relax and reflect. ‘Who will guide me? Who will give me a new direction in life? Nobody has made me a disciple. I feel like a vagabond, just searching. I want to perform seva. I want to experience the divine, but I have no guide. What should I do? How should I go about this? Where should I go?’ While these thoughts were going through his mind, he drifted into a light sleep and suddenly a shadow came across the sun. Swami Sivananda opened his eyes to find out the cause of that shadow and in front of him stood a radiant sadhu.

The sannyasin asked him, “What are you searching for? What do you want?” Swami Sivananda told him that he wished to discover spirituality; he wished to become a renunciate, a sannyasin, and help alleviate people’s pain. He said that he was waiting for somebody who would give him guidance and *diksha*, initiation. The sannyasin responded, “I am your guru and I am going to give you sannyasa.” Right

then and there as the doctor, the brahmachari, sat resting, the radiant ascetic initiated him into Dashnami sannyasa and gave him his sannyasa name, Swami Sivananda Saraswati. Underneath that tree, in fifteen minutes, Swami Vishwananda initiated Swami Sivananda, gave instructions to cultivate his spiritual life, said, “Okay, my job is finished, I won’t see you again,” and walked away.

Swami Sivananda’s encounter with his guru lasted only fifteen or twenty minutes, that is all. However, in the duration of these fifteen minutes, the fire was ignited within him by his guru: the fire of faith, of loyalty, of surrender, of dedication and of discipline. The fire that he kindled in Swami Sivananda’s heart was enough to burn all his past karmas and enlighten his life.

Swami Sivananda succeeded in asking the sannyasin two things: his name and where he came from. The guru replied that he knew that somebody was searching for guidance, so he came in search of that person. He told Swami Sivananda that his name was Swami Vishwananda Saraswati and that he lived in Varanasi. He simply appeared to initiate Swami Sivananda, give him direction and then disappeared from his life completely, and Swami Sivananda was not to have darshan of his guru again.

The mandate: A few years ago, I found a sketch of Swami Vishwananda, and it was published in the *Yoga* magazine with whatever information we could gather about him. He said two things to Swami Sivananda. First, in your personal sadhana, perfect Vedanta, monism. Do not see duality in anything. There is only one tattwa in each one of you, and that tattwa is the divine element. Discover that divine element within you by purifying yourself, by dropping all your samskaras and desires. Purify yourself and you will discover the divinity within you.

Second, in your personal life be a Vedantin, but give people something of value that they can use to improve their lifestyle. Don’t just give them sermons; sermons are not going to help anybody. If you are suffering from asthma and somebody gives you a sermon that you are not this body, you

are the eternal atma, and you are wheezing and suffering, what will your reaction be? “What do you mean I am not this body? I am wheezing, I can’t breathe.” Therefore, give them something useful with which they can improve their life.

Kutir # 111: Swami Sivananda contemplated on these instructions. He spent a long time in isolation, on the banks of the Ganga, at Muni ki Reti in Rishikesh. He stayed in Kutir Number 111, in Swargashram. That room is still preserved as a shrine to Swami Sivananda. If you get an opportunity, visit that place, as you will feel the spiritual vibrancy of Swami Sivananda, his tapasya, in that room. For many years Swami Sivananda lived there in isolation, perfecting his own sadhana and waiting for guidance.

Divine Life Society: On the other bank of Mother Ganga, in a small house known as Anand Kutir, Swami Sivananda established the Divine Life Society. Swami Sivananda was not only blessed by his guru, but had also received instructions on what he needed to do in order to attain spirituality in his life. He was told that the path of selfless service would automatically unfold before him, and that he himself would discover and understand ways of helping others, ways of uplifting others.

It was with this inspiration that Swami Sivananda laid the foundation of the Divine Life Society. He resolved that the aim of his life was to light the spark of spirituality in people’s lives and to help them fully realize their own divinity. It was for this reason that he named his organization ‘The Divine Life Society’.

Swami Sivananda performed the most severe sadhanas. Many people were attracted by the intensity of Swami Sivananda’s sadhana, and young people flocked to him. They became his disciples and followers, and an integral part of his mission.

Siva’s vision: According to Swami Sivananda’s vision, the only effort required to experience divinity in your life is the destruction of the ego. It is not necessary to perform any elaborate exercises, calisthenics or the like. The day

you are able to achieve this, divine qualities will flow from you spontaneously and you will achieve *moksha*, liberation. You will find God, see the unmanifest, achieve the ultimate realization, achieve immortality.

Swami Sivananda used to say that you have to be healthy in every aspect, not just physical health, but also emotional, mental and spiritual health, as good health is every human's birthright. You suffer from poor health because of weakness, your lack of understanding and undisciplined lifestyle. If you cannot regulate your lifestyle, you are bound to be sick. If you lack understanding, whatever you do will have a poor outcome.

He realized that there is a better way to alleviate the suffering of an individual, by providing them with 'capsules of health', in the form of various sadhanas. These capsules affect not only the physical health, but also ensure the spiritual, mental and emotional development.

Siva's personal philosophy: Swami Sivananda started teaching his disciples yoga. He explained that for a sannyasin the tradition is not yoga; the tradition is the vedantic philosophy, and yoga is the sadhana. In this way, he inspired his disciples to perfect yoga as he realized that in the future, the welfare of society would only be possible through yoga. Therefore, all his disciples left the ashram with a single mandate: that of yoga.

Whether it was Swami Satchidananda, Swami Vishnu-devananda, Swami Satyananda, or anybody else, they all propagated yoga. None of them talked about the philosophy of Vedanta, even though that is the tradition and teaching. Why not? It was due to their guru's mandate. Swami Sivananda had told them that Vedanta is the path to follow in their personal life as a sannyasin, and as service to society they must teach yoga, as that is the need, that is what will benefit people.

Siva's contribution: Swami Sivananda found the answer to humanity's physical, mental and emotional suffering in yoga, and since he was a doctor, he was able to understand yoga from an objective, scientific perspective, and not just as a philosophy or an idea. He understood the body in scientific

terms, its anatomy and physiology. He knew the effects that asanas had on the lungs, the heart, the kidneys, and so on. As a result of his medical background, in 1940 Swami Sivananda gave yoga a practical approach and became the first person to present yoga as a therapy. He began research on yoga asanas to determine the benefits of particular practices: which practice cured which disease, which relieved stress, which gave relief from asthma, and so on. Alongside this research, he continued healing patients and prescribing medicines.

Swami Sivananda was an extraordinarily generous person. Once, a pilgrim came to him and said he was on his way to Gangotri, but was feeling unwell. He was worried that he



may not be in a position to complete his pilgrimage due to his ailment. Swami Sivananda gave him some medicine, and asked him to proceed on his journey. Four hours later, Swami Sivananda was sitting by himself, reflecting on the events of the day. He remembered the pilgrim and the medicine that he had administered to him. It suddenly occurred to him that an alternate medicine would have worked better and given faster relief. So what did he do? He summoned one of the ashram inmates, a sannyasin, and gave him a packet containing the new concoction. He told him to go and find the pilgrim and give him the medicine. He also told him not to return to the ashram until he had found the pilgrim and delivered the medicine to him. This is how he felt for others.

While Swami Sivananda developed yoga as a therapy, he said that yoga is not just a science; rather, it is a sadhana to realize the divinity within you. He named his institution 'The Divine Life Society'. According to him, you follow the philosophy to alter your mentality and you adopt yoga as a sadhana to enable you to reach into the depths of your mind. When you are able to reach the deeper layers of your mind and recognize this process as a sadhana, then you will be able to get rid of the negative qualities of your personality and make space for divinity. He said, "Make your life divine. Divinity is your birthright."

Live the divine life

How can divinity be acquired? Divinity can be reached when your mental ability, emotional ability and the ability to act are all unified as one. All three are required. You might be intelligent, but if it does not reflect in your work, what good is your intelligence? If you have the right emotion, but not the intelligence to apply it, you cannot achieve anything. Mind, action and emotion are the three driving forces in life. It is through these that you experience life and progress in life. It is for this reason that the integration of the three is necessary. That is why, when we discuss yoga as systematized and taught by Swami Sivananda, we refer to it as 'yoga of the

head, intellect; heart, emotions; and hands, action'. That is his definition of yoga.

According to Sage Patanjali, the definition of yoga is *chitta vritti nirodhah* – quietening of the mind field, but this just addresses the mind. In *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, Sage Swatmarama states that the aim of yoga is to awaken prana. Swami Sivananda said that only when you bring about a balance in of mind, emotions and action can you perfect yoga. This was his vision.

Teachings of Swami Sivananda

Kill the ego: Swami Sivananda was given a direction that in his personal life he should be a Vedantin, one who does not see any difference between people, but who sees the spark of divinity in everyone.

This is the theory of Vedanta: to see oneness in everything. Sri Krishna says the same thing in the *Bhagavad Gita*. When asked, “What are the qualities of a lovable person?” the first quality Krishna tells is that the person should overcome the mindset of duality in life (12:13): *Advēshta sarvabhootanam* – “One who does not differentiate between me and you, one who sees everyone as equal.” A person who sees everyone with the same attitude is egoless.

Swami Sivananda said that in order to experience the transcendental quality, you have to be egoless. For him, the focus of spiritual life was to be egoless. This was his teaching. He said that God resides within every human being, in every heart. Every individual has an immortal element, an immortal soul, and to experience this it is necessary to cut off the head of the ego. Once this is accomplished, your material life will transform into divine life.

*Within you is the hidden God,
Within you is the immortal self,
Kill this little ‘I’,
Die to live,
Live the divine life.*

Kill this little 'I', the arrogance, the ego which makes 'me' different from all of 'you', which makes 'me' an individual person separate from 'you'. What, then, should be the approach toward life?

Transcend limitations: In another song, *Song of Sadhana*, Swami Sivananda describes how to attain fulfilment in sadhana: purification, concentration, reflection, meditation, illumination, identification, absorption and salvation. These are the eight steps in spiritual sadhana. Only when you walk these eight steps can you say that through your sadhana you are established in spiritual life.

Swami Sivananda said that when you suffer, it is because of an immature mind, a wrong action or a distorted life pattern. These three cause illness, disease and suffering: illness in the body, disease in the mind and suffering in the spirit. When this happens, the individual consciousness does not evolve, but stagnates. In order to live the divine life, you have to eradicate the lower tendencies of your life and sublimate them to pure, balanced and harmonious qualities.

If you wish to cut down a tree, you will certainly need an axe. It is not possible to uproot a tree with your bare hands. If you wish to move a mountain, you will need a bulldozer. In the same way, it is necessary to find a tool, a weapon, a sword that will destroy the ego. For this purpose, to overcome the lower, tamasic tendencies in life and to cultivate spiritual awareness, Swami Sivananda gave certain guidelines, in the form of eighteen *yamas* or disciplines to be followed.

Sage Patanjali also prescribed five yamas. These are only related to the mind and applicable for altering the states of mind. I am referring here to the yamas that are applicable for altering the nature of the ego. Do not confuse the two. Understand that the rationale is different, the goal is different. Sage Patanjali's yamas and niyamas are related to the mind, while Swami Sivananda's yamas and niyamas are related to the destruction of the ego.

The eighteen 'ities': Swami Sivananda's eighteen yamas, which we call 'ities', are: serenity, regularity, absence of

vanity, sincerity, simplicity, veracity, equanimity, fixity, non-irritability, adaptability, humility, tenacity, integrity, nobility, magnanimity, charity, generosity, and purity. You should make the attempt and effort to cultivate these qualities in life. If you are able to grow these beautiful flowers in your life, thorns will not bother you. The bush of roses is thorny. When there is no rose on it, only thorns are seen, but when the rose opens up, nobody looks at the thorns; everyone looks at the beauty of the rose. The thorns exist, but it is the beauty which overpowers the mind. In the same manner, these eighteen virtues have to be cultivated.

These are the yamas for spiritual aspirants. Swami Sivananda taught that material life has to be balanced with spiritual life. Without this balance you cannot progress at all. Just as a bird needs two wings to fly, a human being also needs to live at two levels, the material and the spiritual. Only then can you progress on the path of evolution. For Swami Sivananda, spirituality did not mean adhering to a system of belief, but rather cultivating the appropriate qualities to enhance the potential and creativity of the human personality. Swami Sivananda taught us how to apply these qualities in our daily life. He showed us the attitudes and mindset we needed to develop, and the kind of thoughts to adopt.

Manage the mind: You tend to forget that whatever happens in life is only temporary. In one situation you experience happiness, and then something happens and you feel sad. When you find happiness, you cling on to it. You do not want that situation to change. However, when you are faced with adversity, you want to run away from it; you do not want to have any association with it. Who is responsible for this attitude? It is the mind. If you can keep the mind in check, if you are able to deal with it firmly, it will remain healthy. After all, who did Lord Krishna manage? Did he manage Arjuna or Arjuna's mind? While on the battlefield, Lord Krishna repeatedly told Arjuna, "Do not allow your mind to be disturbed! It is your mind that is

the cause of all your troubles.” He advised him to perform his duty, to follow his dharma, and not allow his mind to waver. He showed him ways to regain his balance and keep his mind under control. In fact, the entire message of the *Bhagavad Gita* is to keep the mind healthy and to prevent it from falling into despondency.

Whatever the circumstance may be, look after your mind. Never let the mind become despondent and dispirited; never let it become weak. Keep it cheerful and positive, and if there is a problem, talk to the mind: “The problem has passed, it has happened, it is in the past, think ahead.” Bad roads slow you down. If you try to accelerate on a bad road your car will break down and you will be unable to proceed with your journey. You must drive slowly on bad roads so that the car is not damaged. In the same manner, in the worst of situations you have to try to bring the mind back to its state of equilibrium bit by bit, so that it is not hurt and always supports you.

Swami Sivananda taught the practice of the eighteen yamas so that you strengthen your spiritual life and make it powerful. The eighteen yamas help you free yourself from the injuries and insults that you face due to the presence of the ego. He believed that if you focus on one yama for a period of one month and try to incorporate it into your life, then in a period of eighteen months you will be able to completely cleanse your personality, get rid of all the dirt and become radiant. This, he said, is the divine life: to free yourself from negative qualities and acquire good, virtuous qualities.

When negative qualities are present in your life, you are a *samsari*, one who lives a worldly life. When good qualities enter your life, you become divine. God alone is divine. Godliness is the result of a divine existence. Attaining divinity turns man into God. It is possible to achieve this on the strength of your effort, sadhana, sustained practice, and sankalpa, firm determination.

It was with these ideals that Swami Sivananda started his mission. Students arrived there and lived in the proximity of their guru. Swami Sivananda advised them to make yoga

a part of their lives as it was through the yogic vision that he found the solution to people's sufferings.

You suffer from physical, emotional and mental diseases, and medicine is no remedy for them. The true remedy lies in trying to cure yourself from within. No outside chemical will be effective in treating inner ailments; the inner self can only be treated by awakening the inner energy. Therefore, Swami Sivananda encouraged his disciples to align their mind, actions and emotions. He told them to make yoga the medium, make it their lifestyle and spread the message of yoga in society.

Swami Sivananda developed a system of living which he called 'the Divine Life'. While living a normal life, you modify your situation, your lifestyle, and your mindset in such a way that you can bring in new components which give you peace and happiness, which open you, which allow you to receive the wind that is blowing from all directions. These are the teachings of Swami Sivananda, which became the foundation for the development of the yoga that was further advanced by one of his disciples, our guru, Swami Satyananda Saraswati.



Gifts of the Tradition

7 February 2011

Swami Sivananda had two questions in his mind when he became a spiritual seeker. The first question was, “Who is going to be my guide? Who will lead me? Who will direct me? Who will initiate me on the path of spiritual awareness, the path of spiritual realization?” The second question was, “How can I alleviate the physical, mental, psychological and spiritual suffering of humankind?”

He received the answer to the first question in the form of his guru, Swami Vishwananda Saraswati, who initiated him into the path of sannyasa and ignited in him the flame of spiritual awareness. Although the meeting between guru and disciple lasted only about fifteen to twenty minutes and occurred only once in their entire lifetime, the connection was so deep and intense that the energy of the guru fused into Swami Sivananda guided him continuously in the later years. Swami Vishwananda mentioned to Swami Sivananda that his mission in life was to give him sannyasa and after that he was free from his mission.

We read stories of gurus waiting for the right disciple to appear. There are many who appear, but it is only the right one who qualifies to carry on with the inspiration, the vision and the wisdom of the guru. Ramakrishna Paramahansa waited for Swami Vivekananda and when Vivekananda came in front of him he said, “I have been waiting for you.” Although Ramakrishna had many other disciples, he was

waiting for one particular person capable enough to carry on his inspiration, vision and mission. It seems that God provides the environment and the people. If it is God's will, then God provides the right conditions and right persons to carry on with the divine work.

The right disciple

Who is the right disciple and who is the right guru? Think of a computer. In a computer, there is an installed software that manages its systems. Whenever you plug a device into the computer, the software reads this device. Without the software, the device will not be recognized. The appropriate operating system has to be there to begin with, which checks all the systems and knows that this is connected, this is not connected, this is unrecognized and this is recognized. Second, what is the capacity of the drive device plugged in? It can be small, say 50 MB, it can be 200 MB, it can be one gigabyte. Most people have a small capacity disk, maybe 50 MB to 100 MB, not even 500 MB. These people expect that the guru will give them all his power. How can the guru do that? It is physically and spiritually impossible. Your capacity, brain and mind can hold only 50 MB, and you want the whole ocean to fit into a small cup?

The guru cannot transfer his or her energy into a disciple who is unqualified no matter how much the disciple demands, rants, raves and abuses the guru. There are people and there are disciples who demand, and when they do not get what they demand, they abuse their guru. That this happens is a fact of life as it is the nature of the brain, mind, emotions, sentiments, character and personality. One cannot help it. Nevertheless, to transfer the guru's energy, certain qualifications, capacities and abilities have to exist.

The guru waits for the right person with the right capacity hard drive and recognizes this person. Twenty people can come and the guru will say, "You" to one of them, having recognized that this person has the right capacity. That happened when Ramakrishna recognized Vivekananda and

when Swami Vishwananda recognized Swami Sivananda. Within fifteen minutes, the transfer of energy took place between guru and disciple. The device which was connected to the computer was identified as the appropriate hardware to which the information could be downloaded. The information was downloaded, and that was the initiation.

The relationship between guru and disciple is based on trust, not on intellect. It is based on faith and conviction, not on satisfaction of intellectual questions. You try to satisfy your intellectual questions in the presence of the guru and because of that, many times you miss the actual secret of connecting with that source of power and energy, which is cultivation of trust and faith. Even if you have a very close and intimate intellectual relationship with the guru, you cannot progress spiritually as the basic connection of trust and faith does not exist. When this trust and faith intensifies, then guru and disciple become one. That happened in the life of Swami Sivananda. It happened in the life of our guru, Sri Swami Satyananda.

Eradication of ego

Infused with inspiration from his guru, Swami Sivananda went into seclusion and perfected his sadhanas, his efforts to achieve and experience the highest spiritual realization. In this process, Swami Sivananda came to the conclusion that the way to experience the highest spiritual awareness is by eradicating one's ego. Ego is the gravitational force of life. If you cannot escape the gravitational force of earth, you cannot go into space. In order to go into space you have to come out of the gravitational force of the earth by sheer strength and power of the engine. Sadhana allows you to create that power. Sadhana is the fuel that allows you to escape from the gravitational pull of the senses and the sense objects, from the pull of ambitions and desires.

Somebody once asked Sri Swamiji, "How does one know that one is evolving spiritually? Is there any landmark? Is there any milestone?" He responded, "Yes, you will know that you

are evolving spiritually when your desires for material gain and success become less and you become more content and fulfilled without any craving to achieve name and fame. That is the indication of a spiritual awakening within you.” The sadhana which allows you to transcend the gravitational pull of life in the form of ego ultimately leads you to spiritual awareness.

How can you transcend the ego? By cultivating certain qualities, which are known as yamas. The approach of Swami Sivananda was not focused on the mind; it was focused on eradicating the ego by cultivating balanced virtues and a balanced mentality in life. Therefore, he defined the yamas as serenity, regularity, absence of vanity, simplicity, and so on, which are known as the eighteen ‘ities’. Swami Sivananda said that if you practise one yama per month and take one step along the way that is enough, regardless of whether you succeed or fail. At least the doors are open and now you can continue your journey. You have to open the gate before you begin the journey. At least practise one yama and walk one percent of the distance. Do not try to complete the journey in one go. Begin your journey and each month pick one yama. Try to live that yama, apply it and experience it in your life. You may succeed, you may fail; however, that is not the issue, you do not need to worry about that. Just keep on going.

Once you try to cultivate the eighteen qualities, you transform your inner personality, and with this transformation and the beautification of your own behaviour and mind, the intense power of the ego gradually diminishes until it dissipates. The lesson concerning spiritual life that Swami Sivananda has given is that each one has to be a farmer in life, not a warrior. Warriors win victories after a lot of bloodshed, death and destruction. Do you want to be a spiritual warrior and go through the death, destruction and bloodshed of your own samskaras, vasanas and all the associated head-trips? Many people in the West say, “Yes, be a spiritual warrior,” but I do not agree with that. How can you claim victory when there is death and destruction all around? You have not been victorious, you have killed everybody. When you can win



them over, only then can you call yourself victorious, not after killing them. After killing them you become a criminal, but after winning them over you become victorious.

The way to win over the ego is through the cultivation of the appropriate qualities which can remove the distorted expressions of the ego, the negative traits of the ego, the negative vrittis that come up because of the ego. That is when the nature becomes pure. That was the approach to spiritual life for Swami Sivananda. He stated that if you can achieve this, the sensorial life will change into divine life.

You will have to work hard to beautify your garden. If you do so, your garden will become beautiful. There is a story about a farmer who bought a piece of barren land and worked very hard and converted it into a beautiful garden of flowers. Many people appreciated his effort, and the name and fame of that person and the garden spread all over the country. Thousands came to see the garden, and among the crowd one day came a priest. When the priest looked at this beautiful garden he was overjoyed and exclaimed, "Look at this beautiful creation of the Lord; He has made this garden

so beautiful!” The farmer, who was standing beside him, said, “Sorry, this is my hard work. You should have seen this land when God was its owner. When God owned this piece of land, nothing grew on it; it was barren. When I bought it, I worked and ensured that this barren piece of land turned into a beautiful flower garden.” God has given you life, now it is your call to beautify it or to leave it barren. If you want to beautify your life, then be a farmer.

Cultivate the appropriate qualities to enhance the potential of your life. These appropriate qualities are the *yamas*. In addition, for your health and for your mental wellbeing, do a little bit of *pranayama*, a little bit of *asana*, a little bit of *japa*, a little bit of charity, a little bit of *seva*, a little bit of selfish work, a little bit of selfless work. Do a little bit of everything.

Swami Sivananda taught to live our *dharma* and *karma*. Do not try to negate them; do not try to alter them. Just protect the good that is within you from the attacks of the elements and animals. Just as you protect a small plant and put a fence around it so that no animal can trample on it, in the same way protect your positive and pious intentions from the negative influences of society, life, people and environment.

Protect your intention, protect your *sankalpa*, your positivity, your sincerity, your integrity, your aspiration from being diverted and influenced. Keep a clear focus and goal. If you apply this principle in every aspect of life you will always be successful, whether it is material life, family life or spiritual life. Try it and see for yourself.

Swami Sivananda visualized the spiritual awakening in every individual through the cultivation of virtuous, positive and creative qualities. He said that you are free to follow your own philosophies, beliefs, religions; you do not have to change anything. Just bring out the goodness in you. Live the way you want, but bring out the goodness in you. This became the *shiksha*, the spiritual tenets, the education, of Swami Sivananda that was imparted to all his disciples.

A disciplined life

Swami Sivananda said that in order to alleviate people's suffering, yoga has to be popularized. Suffering comes into the life of an individual due to certain imbalances. The first imbalance is in the lifestyle. Most people's lifestyle is not regulated. When you sleep, when you eat, when you use your body, when you do not use your body, nothing is regulated. Everybody acts according to their whims. If at night you feel hungry, it is easy to go to the refrigerator, take out something and eat. That is the whimsical mind. There is no structure, no system, no routine, no discipline. Instead, you are only following your whims. It is also due to whims that you fight with other people. You become aggressive because of a whim. There is no sense of reality, no understanding of the actual nature of the situation.

This distorted lifestyle leads to the development of physical imbalance. If you keep flushing the toilet unnecessarily every time somebody goes into the bathroom, forty, fifty times a day, how long will that flush function effectively? Alternatively, you can use the flush only when you use the toilet, maybe three or four times a day. Which will ensure that the flush will work for a longer period? When you use it only three or four times a day.

The body systems also function in the same manner. Take for example, the stomach. Whether you eat one full plate or nibble at one biscuit and have a cup of tea, the same amount of digestive fluids are released into the stomach. The digestive fluids that digest the food in the stomach do not have sensors on them which decide, "Okay, he has eaten only one biscuit so only a teaspoon of digestive fluid will be released. Now he has eaten one whole plate of pasta so a bucket full of digestive fluid will be released." An equal amount is released in either case.

If you eat four times a day, your system will get accustomed to it and automatically at the right time, you will feel hungry, digestion will take place at the right time, absorption will take place at the right time, and expulsion will take place

at the right time. However, if you eat randomly or nibble at something at various times, be ready to have acidity, gastric problems, burning sensations, or other digestive problems, as you are flushing your system with excessive chemicals all the time. Just to satisfy your own greed for a biscuit, you are damaging your system.

Three types of suffering

Swami Sivananda realized that suffering is caused by three factors. The first is *adhyatmic*, coming from your own nature. These are imbalances within your nature, your performance, your character, routine and lifestyle, which you are not able to manage properly. The second is natural causes, for example, changes in the weather. At the onset of cold weather, sniffles start; in dry weather, when dust increases, sneezing starts, redness of the eyes begins; pollution in the environment can cause a reaction; natural disasters can play a role in creating diseases and illnesses. In this way, the natural factors cause an imbalance. Third, relationships and interactions with other people have a role in human health.

The different reasons that make you sick have to be understood, as the straightforward way to acquire health and wellbeing is to live a proper life and apply appropriate discipline: a little bit of asana, a little bit of pranayama, a little bit of yoga nidra, a little bit of meditation, a little bit of kriya yoga, a little bit of shankhaprakshalana, a little bit of neti; something that you can integrate into your daily activity, not as a separate practice for which you have to set aside an hour of your time, but something you can do on the run.

Serve, love, give

Swami Sivananda instructed his disciples to propagate yoga and many of his disciples became yoga masters and yoga authorities in their own right. Swami Sivananda found that through service, through yoga and through helping people change the environment of their home and dealings with material things, it is possible to raise the level of awareness

and health of any individual. Therefore, to alleviate suffering he developed his three sutras, which Sri Swamiji later chose as the sankalpa of Rikhia.

First, serve. Whether it is through medicine, through food, through clothes, through providing a shelter, through yoga, lectures, sermons, or education, whatever media you can use to serve others, use that media to uplift them.

Second, love. Do not think that you are superior to anybody or that you are better than anybody, or that somebody else does not know as much as you, but respect who they are and love them for what they are. Do not try to reform them by saying your lifestyle is better. Sri Swamiji used to tell us, “Don’t tell anybody ever, ‘Change this and that in your life.’” He used to tell me, “How do you know that the lifestyle they are living is not superior to yours? If you know that their lifestyle is inferior to yours then you have some right to say, “Look, become better by living in this manner”, but if you don’t know, then keep quiet. Don’t try to impose your views and ideas on anybody.” He was clear about this. Love is acceptance, appreciation and respect for the other person.

Third, give. Learn to share what you have received. If you have received happiness, share happiness. If you have received wealth, share your wealth. Learn to share, learn to give.

These three precepts became Swami Sivananda’s foundation for alleviating the suffering of humankind. This was the teaching that each disciple received from him, and they carried this message of Swami Sivananda throughout the world.

Swami Satyananda’s time with Swami Sivananda

At guru’s ashram: In this group of disciples, there was an aspirant called Swami Satyananda. In the ashram, Swami Satyananda was in an active administrative role. He was in-charge, he was manager, he was publisher, he was secretary to Swami Sivananda. Swami Sivananda himself has said, “Swami Satyananda can do the work of four people, yet he never complains.” If a person can do the work of four people, it

means that he is a multitasker; he can do many things at one time. Due to this ability, he was always in the management and administration. He never went to a yoga class. He never went to any classes which were officially being conducted by the ashram. He was the organizer, not the participant. In this manner he served his guru without formally learning the systems of yoga.

A magnetic personality: Swami Satyananda was not an ordinary person. He was a gifted person, who had a remarkable personality, full of radiance, and had photographic memory. What he saw he would not forget; what he heard, he would not forget. People were amazed by his memory. Once, some people from Chhattisgarh had come to Rikhia. Sri Swamiji had visited them in their village fifty years ago, when he had spent four months of the monsoon season, *chaturmas*, with them. After fifty years, he recognized several of those present. "You are so-and-so, you are so-and-so, and you are so-and-so!" He recognized a sixty-year-old man, who was a ten-year-old boy when they had last met. He remembered him, his father, his mother; he told him he had so many brothers, so many sisters! Those people had tears in their eyes. After fifty years, even though they had become old, Sri Swamiji still remembered them. This was the level of his mental capacity.

His audiographic memory was equally sharp. Swamiji could listen to a whole one or two hour lecture of Swami Sivananda, then sit down at night in front of the typewriter, probably a first generation Wellington typewriter, and just type out the whole lecture word by word from memory. This would then go for printing in the morning. Remember that I am talking about the 1940s when there were no tape recorders, no cameras, nothing, just memory and mind. In that environment, Swami Satyananda typed all the satsangs and lectures of Swami Sivananda until the end of 1953. All the publications that were published by Divine Life Society at that time are translations or transcriptions of the lectures of Swami Sivananda, transcribed by our guru, Swami Satyananda.



Discipleship: Sri Swamiji was always looking for opportunities to serve his guru and find ways to integrate Swami Sivananda's teachings in his life. Sri Swamiji has himself said that he never attended any classes. He did not know anything about asana, pranayama, pratyahara, or dhyana. In fact, when classes used to start he would sleep because that was the only time he had free. Where was the time for yoga? During the day he was in administration, in the evening in

the satsang and lecture programs and at night he was typing the lectures, which he submitted to Swami Sivananda at four in the morning, when he opened his door. Only then would he have a little time to rest, and that was the time when classes used to take place. Sri Swamiji has mentioned in the book *Yoga Nidra* that he used to sleep while his guru brothers chanted the Vedas and the Upanishads, and did asana and pranayama. In this way, Swami Satyananda lived with his guru, in tune with his guru and the teachings of his guru, but totally oblivious to the subject of yoga.

Shaktipat: At the end of twelve years, when Swami Sivananda told him to go out and spread the word of yoga, he responded, “I do not know anything about yoga. I do not even know the ABC of yoga. How do you expect me to propagate this? I have never participated in any class. All I have done is work in the ashram.” Swami Sivananda said, “Come with me”, and he took Swami Satyananda into his room, shut the door and, according to Sri Swamiji, in fifteen minutes he taught him kriya yoga. Most people understand kriya yoga as a process of awakening the kundalini, but here Sri Swamiji is hinting at shaktipat.

Shaktipat is the transfer of information from one hard drive to another hard drive. It is a transfer of information, a transfer of energy. It is downloading the information from one hard disk to another hard disk, provided the computer has the software and the other device also has the same software. The transfer can happen only if the computer recognizes the limitations and the capacity of the hard disk and that the hard disk is capable of taking all the information of the original hard disk. Shaktipat is synonymous to downloading.

In the case of Swami Sivananda and Sri Swamiji, the guru and the disciple were compatible. Consequently, Swami Sivananda connected himself to Sri Swamiji and in fifteen minutes gave him shaktipat, the whole download, which is what Sri Swamiji is referring to when he says, “He taught me kriya yoga.” This is not the kriya yoga that you learn as

a practice. Here, kriya yoga means the yoga of transference, shaktipat. He then told him to leave, to become a *digvijayi*, conquerer of the world, and to spread the message of yoga from door to door and shore to shore. With this mandate, Sri Swamiji left the ashram.

Swami Satyananda's gifts

Filled with the grace of guru and personal conviction, Sri Swamiji left the ashram, travelled around India, came to Munger and established the yoga movement. In those days, in the fifties and sixties, yoga was not known to society. Yoga was only a term and nobody knew the meaning of yoga sadhana, or how to practise it. There were few yoga teachers in India and Europe. Generally, the Indian yoga teachers at that time were trying to present yoga to society as a routine of life and the yoga teachers in the West were presenting yoga for body building and trimming the waist line.

The first generation of yoga teachers around the world were not teaching yoga for the development of life, they were teaching yoga so that you could look good, the skin would look beautiful, the waist line might be trimmed. The slogan was 'Yoga for health and beauty', by Swami Saraswati in Australia, by Richard Hittleman in England, by Roma Blair in Australia, and by many other people around the globe. People do their yoga practices in front of a room-length mirror to see how flexible they have become. That is how yoga has been presented.

When Sri Swamiji reached Munger, he realized that although his guru had directed him to teach yoga, he had no means to teach. Personally, he would have preferred to live in solitude, have nothing to do with any ashram, not to have to promote yoga as a yoga teacher, but to live as an ascetic. He wished to immerse himself in the single-minded pursuit of perfecting his guru's teachings and integrate them into his life and this would not be possible while he lived within society. In society he would have to keep on performing karma. What to do? Sri Swamiji then told himself, 'I have

received my mandate. This is my duty now, my dharma. I sacrifice my own wishes and ambitions.'

Sri Swamiji surrendered his own desires in order to follow his guru's mandate. He decided that until yoga became established as a household word worldwide, he would not rest. This became the aim of his life.

When the guru gives his blessings and a disciple has faith then nothing is impossible. The guru's blessing and the disciple's faith together can work wonders. Blessing by itself is not enough. Faith by itself is not enough. One cannot clap with only one hand; you need both hands. One hand is God's or guru's, and the other hand is faith. Full of faith and blessed by his guru, Sri Swamiji made the impossible, possible.

He set up a yoga ashram in Munger. Those who have been here long enough will remember that in 1964, during the yoga convention, he announced, "Yoga is the culture of tomorrow." When he started his work of spreading the message of yoga, Sri Swamiji was welcomed by all castes, religions and communities. He visited Islamic countries, Christian countries, Buddhist nations, Jain communities, Sikh communities. Nowhere did he face any opposition. This was because his message of yoga education was practical; it was scientific and modern, in a language that is easy for all to understand.

Sri Swamiji was not just a preacher of yoga. He was not merely a yoga teacher or yoga propagator. In fact, all the work done in the field of yoga in the past by the many ancients does not compare with what Sri Swamiji accomplished in one lifetime in this century. He has done much more work in the field of yoga and surpassed the sages and scholars. How did he achieve this? He worked to extract the information from the classical yogic texts and scriptures, to make it understandable in modern language and acceptable by society, as well as the scientific and academic communities.

Sri Swamiji gave a new perspective to the whole yogic practice. Sage Patanjali defined only one yoga, raja yoga in the *Yoga Sutras*. He was the master of one yoga, like professors in a college, who specialize in one subject.

Similarly, other masters excelled in one aspect of yoga each. Swami Satyananda, however, gave a whole structure, a complete body, to the system of yoga. He did not create a limb, saying this is one arm; he did not create an organ, saying this is the eye. He created the body and said this is the body called yoga, comprised of hatha yoga, raja yoga, karma yoga, jnana yoga, kundalini yoga, kriya yoga, mantra yoga, nada yoga, and laya yoga. This is the teaching of Swami Satyananda.

Not only did Swami Satyananda define the full body of yoga, he also researched and brought forth the systems and techniques that we and everyone else are using now for pratyahara, dharana, dhyana, asana and pranayama. What is pratyahara? What is dharana? What training does it involve? What is dhyana? What are its different stages? What is kriya yoga? It was Sri Swamiji who first provided clarity, wrote and published a book on kriya yoga and presented it to the world as a literary work.

Swami Satyananda was the first person who came out with instructions on mudras and bandhas. Prior to that nobody was teaching mudras and bandhas. Similarly, nobody was teaching pranayama. I am talking about the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, and I am proud to belong to a tradition that has revived the science and the subject of yoga in today's society.

Sri Swamiji clarified the concept of bhakti yoga, which even today is considered to be only a subject of worship and adoration of the Lord. Sri Swamiji said that just as raja yoga has eight stages, and it is only after one has gone through these stages that a state of purity and clarity is achieved, bhakti yoga has nine stages, and through these stages you are able to cleanse the heart and purify it. He explained it as the subject of psychology, which brings about mental change. The eight steps of raja yoga helps you travel from one end of the mind to the other. In the same manner, the nine steps of bhakti yoga help you travel through your world of sentiments and emotions.

Sri Swamiji gave bhakti yoga its own unique psychological interpretation, to separate it from the common religious and



devotional understanding. In his book, *The Age of Bhakti*, he clearly states that in the future scientists, sadhus and society in general will conduct research on human emotions, and will conclude that bhakti is the means to purify the emotions, as its nine stages are sequential and progressive conditions.

Sri Swamiji worked on hatha yoga as well. The practices of neti, kunjal and shankhaprakshalana which are well known today were not known until Sri Swamiji taught us how to practise them. Sri Swamiji presented and published the practical side of yoga, whether it was raja yoga, kriya yoga, or hatha yoga. He also described the skills you need to develop in order to make your life beautiful.

Sri Swamiji dedicated the yogic mission to his guru by fulfilling his mandate. He said, “You asked me to propagate yoga. I have done it, and in its final completion, I offer it to you.” Ganga Darshan is the offering of Sri Swamiji to his guru. It is also Sri Swamiji’s gift to us, a culmination of his

efforts, the results of which he passed on to us. If in the future the credit goes to anybody for reviving yoga, history will give credit to Swami Satyananda and to Bihar School of Yoga for systematizing yoga.

The yogic journey

Sri Swamiji explained that one begins yoga as a practice. This practice then becomes *sadhana*, continuous effort. The *sadhana* becomes part of the lifestyle, and once you imbibe yoga in your lifestyle, yoga becomes the culture of your life, an expression of your life. Therefore, Sri Swamiji proclaimed widely that yoga is the culture of tomorrow. “Yoga is the heritage of yesterday, the science of today and the culture of tomorrow.”

The first step: The yogic journey begins in everybody’s life in the form of a practice. What brings you to yoga? When you are fed up with a physical or mental problem for which you have tried all solutions, but without success. At that point you feel, “This is the only way left; might as well try it out and see if it works for me.” This is why most people see yoga as a tool for health and come to yoga to achieve good health.

When you are a child and you think, “I want to become a doctor when I grow up”, you don’t go to medical school right away. First, you get admitted into a primary school and learn your ABCs. You have to learn how to hold a pen and write on paper. In this way, you begin your education towards your final goal of becoming a doctor. It is the same with yoga.

Yoga is certainly a science of the mind and a study of the inner journey, but it begins with the study of the body. If you have a computer at home but you do not know how to use it, what good is it? It is collecting dust on the table; you’ve spent money on it, but it serves no purpose. If you want to use the computer, you have to plug it in, switch it on, understand the software and basic operating systems. Similarly, the basic operation for yoga, the beginning, is through the body.

The scriptures say, *Shariramadyam khalu dharma sadhanam* – “The body is the medium to achieve your dharma.” As

long as you remain healthy you will be able to perform your duties and your dharma. The moment your health begins to deteriorate, responsibilities are forgotten and dharma is forgotten. Therefore, the entry point for yoga is the body. The body becomes the medium through which you are introduced to yoga. It is not the end. Many people regain their health and stop at this point and call this yoga. When such thinking becomes prevalent in society, the belief that yoga is limited to the body, then people are unable to discover its other benefits.

Sri Swamiji says that when you are sick, when you are stressed, when you are unable to sleep, when you cannot digest your food properly, when you cannot see well, when you do not hear well, when you cannot breathe properly, then come to yoga. At least you will take the first step into yoga, and when you take this first step, you will get some physical benefit. It may not be a hundred percent, it may only be ten percent, but at least you will feel ten percent better. Once this little improvement takes place, you will want to increase it and try for a hundred percent, so you will go deeper into yoga, perform the practices, try to make them a part of your daily routine, and in this way you will begin a relationship, build a connection with yoga. Always bear in mind that yoga does not end with the body; the body is the starting point in your yogic journey.

The second step: Once you form a connection with yoga and start believing in the aim of yoga, which is the upliftment and transformation of your personality, then you approach yoga as a sadhana and drop yoga as a practice. When you adopt yoga as a sadhana, then you are able to gain control over your mind, senses and body.

The third step: When you accept yoga as a sadhana in your life, it becomes a way of life. It no longer is a routine that you practise for an hour daily. Instead, you use it every second of the day.

Take the sannyasins for example. They are busy the whole day long, running around like headless chickens

from the early morning until night-time. At night they are so tired that they fall asleep practising meditation. Very rarely do they get an opportunity to practise their asana and pranayama.

However, when I see them, I do not think they need to practise yoga separately because their lifestyle reflects yoga. They are living yoga, they are breathing yoga, they are eating yoga, they are drinking yoga. They are practising yoga and are constantly in tune with the philosophy of yoga. There is a constant awareness of yoga and therefore there is a constant awareness of the self, a constant awareness of the mind, a constant awareness of behaviour. Whether they control it or not is a separate issue.

Some are irritable, some are angry, some have an attitude, some are tranquil, some are gentle. Shiva's tribe is made up of all sorts and sannnyasins also come in all shapes and sizes. However, there is a constant awareness: of their minds, of their thoughts, of their work; there is a constant awareness of yoga. The work gets done in the spirit of yoga and yoga becomes a lifestyle. Not a disjointed part of life, but a lifestyle.

The final step: When yoga becomes a lifestyle, it challenges your samskaras and alters them. When this happens, yoga becomes a part of your *samskriti* or culture. It is said, *Samyak kritena iti samskriti*. Samskriti does not mean song and dance or bhajan and kirtan. It means that any work you undertake is executed properly and in a thorough manner. *Samyak* means systematic, indicating that your behaviour, attitude and thinking should reflect a certain standard through which your good qualities come forward and provide an inspiration to others. To be a representative of samskriti, your thinking, actions and behaviour must reflect a certain code of conduct through which dharma becomes established in life.

The journey of yoga begins with *abhyasa*, practice, evolves into sadhana, becomes a lifestyle and in the end emerges as *samskriti*, culture.

The role of Bihar Yoga

Since the Bihar School of Yoga was founded, our purpose, aim and goal has been the establishment of yoga as a culture. When Bihar Yoga Bharati was to be given the status of a university, officials from the University Grants Commission (UGC) asked us if we were going to teach only yoga. In a university, you need different faculties, such as arts, science, commerce, and so on; only then can it be called a university. I said, "Yes, I understand your thinking. This is the norm all over India and the world. Universities have numerous faculties and teach various subjects. We are not going to teach only yoga; rather, we will teach yoga as a culture." For them yoga meant asanas, they thought that students would only be doing sit-ups all day long! I told them, "If you do not know what yoga is then come and join the class as a student and you will discover yoga!" Only when they saw the syllabus and the various departments: Yoga Philosophy, Yoga Psychology, Applied Yoga, and Yoga Ecology, did they concede that the Bihar School of Yoga was indeed a university. They cannot be blamed because in society the general belief is that yoga is just a collection of physical exercises.

In the western countries, they believe that yoga is a science of the mind. In 1968, when Swami Satyananda visited the US for the first time, he was invited by a jail in Chicago so that the inmates could learn to calm their aggressive and restless tendencies through yoga. The first time I went to the US, I was sponsored by the San Quentin Prison. In the US, institutions like prisons and drug rehabilitation centres use the practice of yoga as part of their program to benefit the inmates. In India, yoga has been incorporated as part of education recently, and the results are visible. Today, it is necessary that yoga becomes an integral part of life, that it becomes a lifestyle, and the Bihar School of Yoga is carrying out this work.

Munger: a siddha bhoomi

When people from Bihar go travelling and someone finds out they are from Bihar, the first question is, "Do you know



Munger?” Once, a person from Munger went to London for a heart surgery. The doctor saw his residential address and said, “You are wasting your money. Go back. Go to the yoga ashram in Munger, learn yoga, and you will be fine.” The poor fellow had saved his money to go to London, only to be sent back by the doctor. This person is part of the ashram family today, healthy and hearty.

Munger is a very special place. It takes its name from Rishi Mudgal, who is described in the *Mahabharata* as having had an ashram on the banks of the river Ganga, at the foothills of the Vindhyachal mountains. This is the only hillock that fits the description. This is also the territory of Karna, a king who was renowned all over the ancient world for his generosity. Ganga

Darshan is located on the spot known as Karna Chaura. There used to be an old platform here, difficult to say from which era. It is believed that from this same spot, Karna used to distribute gold and wealth to his subjects. He used to worship Goddess Chandi in the nearby Chandisthan temple, and when she was pleased with his penance she would give him as much gold as his weight, which he would distribute from here. Sita left her footprints in Munger which can still be seen clearly. Many saints and ascetics have lived in Munger: Rabindranath Tagore stayed here, Swami Vivekananda spent some time here, Swami Sivananda came here, and Swami Satyananda made this his karma bhoomi.

Munger is the place where Sri Swamiji had the revelation that yoga would be the culture of the world. He heard a voice proclaiming this; he has documented this in his books. This is also the place where Sri Swamiji had a vision that Swami Sivananda had left his body in Rishikesh. This is a holy place, steeped in spirituality. The yoga that has emerged from Munger has now reached every corner of the world and has been accepted as the most comprehensive and respected yogic system.

The next phase that we will begin in Munger is the strengthening and reinforcement of the Indian culture and heritage with Sannyasa Peeth. Just as the yoga movement began in Munger and spread to every corner of the world, in the same way the next movement will also begin in Munger and leave its mark on the whole world. I have received the next mandate. Sri Swamiji has laid out the plans. The seed for that mission has already been planted in Munger.

Maintaining the bridge of yoga

The modern-day sage of yoga is Swami Satyananda. I am saying this not because I am his disciple, but because I have seen the growth and development of the yogic process over the last fifty years. I have seen the struggle, the difficulties and the ease with which yoga has spread globally, as I was fortunate enough to play a role in this yoga movement. If in

the future someone asks, “Who was the leader of the yogic renaissance in the world?” unanimously the decision would be Swami Satyananda.

To conclude, our vision of yoga is ‘yoga as a subject of life’. This vision was conceived by Swami Sivananda and it was given a definite form and shape by Swami Satyananda. We are the experimenters and practitioners of that yoga. Today, from my experience, I can say that yoga is not a method by which one can attain self-realization; rather, it is the method by which one can appreciate and worship life and the opportunities that life presents to each one of us.

Hari Om Tat Sat





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The Yogadrishti (Yogavision) series of satsangs consists of discourses given by Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati in Munger as part of the new phase of sannyasa life that he has embarked upon since 2009.

The theme of the satsangs Swamiji gave in February 2011 at Ganga Darshan Vishwa Yoga Peeth was the development of Satyananda Yoga. Going back to ancient times and tracing the evolution of yoga, Swamiji presented the roots of Satyananda Yoga. He provided an understanding of yoga from a wide perspective: as worship of life and as a sadhana to rediscover and enhance the qualities of one’s nature. Recounting the life and teachings of Swami Sivananda and Swami Satyananda, Swamiji described the transformative role of Bihar School of Yoga in the pages of history.



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